

ISSUE 94

Flagship

THE POSTAL AND EMAIL GAMING MAGAZINE

in this issue

Middle Earth

DungeonWorld

Kings of Karadon

Lords of the Earth

Primus Inter Pares

Quest GME

plus ...

Flagship Ratings for 2001

Zine Scene & New Zine Listings

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MADHOUSE

Report from the Bridge

AT THE STILL POINT

IT'S BEEN a difficult time world-wide since our last issue came out, with a ghastly example of human wickedness on September 11th that will stay in our minds for ever. Of course, the importance of gaming diminishes when we're on a war footing in the real world. It casts a shadow over us all.

We hope that you'll still be able to enjoy this issue, and the relief of playing a good game, or several. There's plenty here, with numerous ideas for new games to start and older ones to come back to. Lots to captivate you and, as always in *Flagship*, with players' voices to the fore.

We've been extending and updating our listing for PBeM games, which are becoming the most busy part of the hobby. Do contact us if you know of other PBeM games which we've not included. No, we won't abandon postal players, either!

We're keen to correct any omissions or inaccuracies in the whole set of listings, so will be happy to learn from you. Moderators themselves don't always tell us when they're starting up or, sigh, closing down. Oh, and apologies for any difficulty you found in reading last issue's *Galactic View*: the reason for its blurriness is a tale that's too complicated to relate without gestures and a guitar, but we hope we've fixed this now.

We're bidding farewell to our Sports Editor, Chris Dickson, this issue. Chris has enlivened our pages with his vivid writing and wide interests, to raise our coverage of sports games into an important part of *Flagship*. Chris, we'll miss you, but many thanks. At the time I'm writing this we're still looking for a replacement: if you've an interest in PBM sports games and think you can write about them every two months, do get in touch with us.

Christmas approaches, at speed. Hey, it's a fun time: families, cards and presents. We don't hold enough feasts in Britain, so should make the most of this one. Do you have any gaming friends who'd like a subscription to *Flagship* as a gift from you? We'll happily send their first issue with a Christmas card in your name, and add an extra issue to your own subscription.

There hasn't been a PBM convention this year, but we are planning to take a table at Dragonmeet at Kensington Town Hall on December 1st: hope we'll see plenty of you there.

Finally, I'm delighted to announce that this month, November 2001, contains a blue moon. Good news for gamers? It's got to be!

Carol

Flagship

Issue No. 94

November / December 2001

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Founding Editors

Nicholas Palmer MP & Chris Harvey

Flagship Hivemind

Editorial Overmind: Carol Mulholland, *Consultant Editor:* Nick Palmer, *Subs & Advertising:* Ken Mulholland
Layout: Colin Forbes, *Ratings:* Tim Lomas, *Sports Editor:* Chris M Dickson, *Webmaster:* Tom Fyfe

Contributors

Art: House Artist, Larry Deyell. Also: Abe Papakhian (p11), Mia Hart-Allison (p17),
Cover: Angus McBride
Articles & Reviews: Darryl Ashing, Franz Berthillier, Duncan Chisholm, Jeffrey A. Dobberpuhl, Colin Forbes,
Thomas Harlan, John Harrington, Tim Lomas, Andy London, BobMcLain,
Carol Mulholland, Jonathan Smith, Mark Stretch.

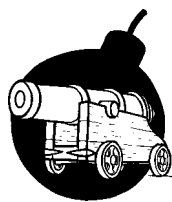
Advertising, subscriptions and all contributions FLAGSHIP,

14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT
Tel (01395) 276632 (9am-6pm)
E-Mail: flagship@flagship-pbm.co.uk
www.flagship-pbm.co.uk

Ratings can be sent via Flagship, the Website or emailed direct to
Tim Lomas at flagshipratings@antsnest.demon.co.uk

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NON-FANTASY WARGAMING

Pagoda Games are starting two new games of their **World War IV** this month.

The first will be a team game featuring seven teams of four players. These games have a big difference from regular games of WWIV, in that there is no scope for backstabbing, as you remain allied to the three other players throughout the game. There are a couple of places left on one team should anyone fancy giving this a try.

There's also a new 40-player game starting at the end of November, again with space for a few late comers to join in the action. These games have a good mix of UK, European and US players, and are truly international affairs. Newcomers are welcome to join, and although WWIV is known for its opportunities for backstabbing, novices will stand a fair chance as there are always experienced players scattered around the map willing to help.

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

The star-studded *Lord of the Rings* film is due for release just before Christmas. *Harlequin Games*, who run **Middle Earth PBM** world-wide, see this as an important day, not just for them but in PBM history: 'We're very curious, hopeful and somewhat terrified to see what impact this has on the PBM market as PBM makes the mainstream international headlines. Well we can but hope - fingers crossed.' Hear, hear!

Harlequin report that Middle Earth continues to grow, with over a thousand (yes, 1,000!) players in the game now. They run the game for players from all over the world: North America, English-speaking Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Excellent news is that they're bringing out a new module, *Battle of the Five Armies*. This sounds ideal as a fast-paced introductory game, and fun for experienced players as well. It's a game for five players, lasting for up to ten turns, with a reduced set of rules. In it, the Warg Riders and the Goblins are fighting the Free People Nations. The Warg Riders include the Necromancer of 'The Hobbit' fame, and Gollum, while the Goblins consist of Bolg the Great and his goblin retinue. The Free Peoples are the Northmen (the Lake people - including Bard and Beorn as special guest star), Dwarves (Thorin Oakenshield and Bilbo), and the Elves (Legolas and the Lord of the Eagles). But the Northmen and the Elves are very much on the back foot as the hordes descend - awaiting the Dwarven folk of the Iron Hills to rescue them ..

Check out the website:

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

for the free rules, colour map, and turns.

Harlequin are also looking for any player with Mac and PC experience who may be interested in working part-time on 'updating the program, creating a modern beautiful front end and general work'. Colour turnsheets are being created now - stand by for up to date news of this and other projects as they develop.

Middle Earth is a good game, and Harlequin provide a first-class service. It'll be splendid if the arrival of the film increases public awareness of Harlequin's game and the PBM hobby in general.

Harlequin Games are recruiting for their next game of **Legends**, North Island Campaign 26, which will be a standard game of this popular module. They are trying out a public nomination system on the NIC page on the website, whereby the players state what faction or race they are going to play. Harlequin expect this to prevent oversubscription to any one faction, giving a more balanced game. If it proves popular, they'll probably use it in all future standard games.

North Island Campaign 25 has just begun.

This is a small teams variant, involving only 12 players in the tiny crucible of Ur'Rah island. In this variant, the starting positions are massively accelerated, to allow endgame tactics from the first turn. 'There should be little need to build up any of the characters,' says GM Sam Roads, 'the bloodletting should have already begun!' Ooo, er...

The Swords of Pelarn game, 23, has recently ended. It was won by the Grey Knights faction. Sam describes the game, saying that the Shadowling 'Sin' took an early stance by removing all Shadowling opposition. Player 'Don Ford' was head and shoulders above the opposition during the power/influence phase, picking up many module cities, but was forced to let go of the position when real life took him to a job in America and no free time to play.' (Real life, what a pain this can be!) 'The Knights built on his successes and worked for the rest of the game on trying to stamp down on all the other factions who attempted to band together to bring them down. With a series of conclusive battles to control the sky castles and a sterling run of form for Om High Priest Ferak Dirtwater, they proved simply too strong to beat.'

Interestingly, of the five Legends games to finish with Harlequin as referees, this is the first where the strongest team in the opening game actually went on to win. Congratulations to the victorious Grey Knights, who are listed in the HALL OF FAME.

You'd expect the empires of *Harlequin's Crack of Doom* to spend most of their time in feuding and bickering - game worlds aren't that different for the real one. But did holding the Lorasias Games slacken the empires' ill will towards each other? Fat chance! - here's GM John's account of what happened:

'Sad to say, however, far from settling old grudges and arguments, the Games served only to lend further fuel to the flames of discord, with the dwarven empires declaring blood war on the goblin clans, who had the audacity to kill one of their leaders in unarmed combat. Still, poems were orated, songs sung, and a good time had by all. Well, save for the dead dwarf, that is. Other than that, life in Lorasias continues as usual - demons from chaos dimensions threatening to break down the boundaries between reality and throw the world into chaos, war, treachery, and perhaps worst of all, the Bard's Corner of the monthly newsletter.'

Serim Ral is run by three separate firms, each with their own way of moderating this lively fantasy wargame. *Harlequin Games* are about to release of their latest game of Serim Ral, *SR52 - The Underdark*. The map is new, as are the profiles and races. Because they have more players than before, they've paid special attention to the Adventures and Quests that can be found while investigating the world.



FANTASY WARGAMES cont...

There's a free newsletter with each turn, and special actions that help you to enhance your particular strengths. With a fixed cost, this game is cheap to play, with lots of depth for players new to the world of Serim Ral and experienced players who're looking for a new approach. The design-you-own points set-up - a first in Serim Ral history - allows you to individualise your position to suit your own style of play.

It's a game that can be joined successfully after it's first been started. Space is still available at this early stage, but if you can't get into it now you can join it later when time allows.

Contact Harlequin for information, or download the module from:

www.HarlequinGames.com

GM Stephen R White put his fantasy wargame **Kings of Steel** on hold because of serious

personal difficulties, but the good news is that the game is now up and running again. Game 66 has been completed, game 67 is under way and Stephen has a waiting list for the next game, 68.

If you're one of his ex-players who hasn't heard from him, will you get in touch? Some addresses have changed since Steve was last active, and he wants to offer you a place or refund your outstanding credit.

Pagoda Games plan to run one final game of **Alamaze**, probably at the end of the year. It's a good game, and any former players, or newcomers wishing to give this classic a try should get in touch.

As *Pagoda* have a number of rulebooks left, these can be purchased for just the cost of postage (£1) if you wish to see what the game is about before committing.

Pagoda are still starting new games of the old favourite, **Adventurer Kings**, every six-eight

weeks. They've also been running private games, so if there's a group of friends wishing to play in their own game (between 5-10 players usually) they'll be happy to arrange it.

Places are available in both games 1 and 2 of Hunky Monkey's **Kings of Karadon**. Each game has a different plot. That of game 1 is centred around a magically induced mini-ice age and the resulting consequences; that of game 2 revolves around the return of dark gods known as the Ancients.

You may write for a random startup, but the GMs advise that it's better to chat to them first, to ensure you get a position suited to your style of play. Both games feature a free-form special action, as well as free-form quests and some other similar actions along these lines. Start-up is £5 and until Christmas this includes a free turn. Subsequent turns are £5 with - here's a neat idea - a small discount for getting orders in early. Turnaround for both games is monthly.



FIRMS

Regular readers will know Jeremy Wasden as a Flagship reviewer, and some of you may have met him in games as a fellow player, too. You'll be pleased to hear the news, therefore, that Jeremy's now starting up as a moderator, with a firm he's calling *Fuel PBM*.

Fuel PBM have bought **Heavens Above** from Spellbinder Games and **Continental Rails II** from Madhouse. Both are well-established games, but Jeremy's been sensibly running them through an initial process of testing. Both *Heavens Above* and *Continental Rails* are now ready to play.

The idea of *Heavens Above* is a neat one, and easy to describe: everyone plays a deity in the heavens, who seeks to gain favour with the people below and then use the power gained from their worship to become the deity who controls the whole universe. What makes this difficult, of course, is that there are other deities with the same idea, so it's useful to contact potential allies as soon as possible. You can play a good, an evil or a neutral god, with divine powers to match your alignment. Straightforward enough, except there's the interesting twist that further powers become available as you progress in the game, offering new strategies which keep it fun to play. Because *Heavens Above* has this depth, we've run two articles on it in Flagship: in issues 48 and 61. Both reviewers agreed that it's a good, fast and enjoyable game.

Continental Rails is a game about building and managing America's mighty railways. It's an economic game rather than a wargame, but expect to encounter fierce rivalries nevertheless!

Fuel's charges are a very reasonable £5 for start up and two turns, and then £2.25 each for the following turns. A complete game is £40, with a special introductory offer of £35 for a complete game to Flagship readers who respond before the next issue. If you take up this offer, Fuel stress that they will be very happy to put anyone who paid for a complete game but got knocked in the early turns, into another game. Contact details are in Galactic View.

Another new PBM firm is *Rebus Games*, which again is starting up with a game that Spellbinder used to run, in this case the sf wargame **Galaxy**.

Rebus's GM, Dominic Mason, has been a PBMer for nearly ten years, mainly with *Galaxy*, but also with numerous football games. Dominic designed his own ('basic,' he says) football PBM about five years ago, but didn't have the time to make a go of it then. Learning from this, however, he's planning to develop a football game in the future, and possibly a land-based fantasy war-game.

Dominic stresses that he is determined to provide good service: 'the focus for Rebus Games will be to deliver a first-class gaming experience - not just from the point of view of the game itself, but from the customer service and support provided to gamers. We will be actively seeking gamers' suggestions and ideas on how to improve the game. There is no website at the moment, but there should be one in the new year.'

Spellbinder Games are offering other games for sale. There's the scenario for **The Apoch**, which may interest anybody who wants to run a hand-

moderated game, **Peace & War**, **Hit for Six**, a cricket simulation, **Horses For Courses**, a racing game and **LTWars**, because the arrangement with Titan PBM which we reported last issue has unfortunately fallen through.

Also, Spellbinder are willing to sell the programs they use for running **The Bledian Diary**, though not the game itself. These would allow you to run a tribal powergame, even a fantasy one, of your own making, but they warn that it won't be a cheap sale.

Harlequin Games won't be running further games of **Battle of the Planets** or **CTF 2187**, because they consider that 'both games are just too old for the modern PBMer'. If you look under SCIENCE FICTION GAMES up above, however, you'll see that there's a similar game to *Battle of the Planets* called **Galactic Invasion 3**, now available by email from GM Steve Arnott.

Keith Burnham of *Pagoda Games* thanks all his players for their support and patience during a difficult time over the past six weeks. Moving house took much longer than expected, and then there were delays in getting the telephone connections and the NTL internet connection up and running.

Keith has also started a new job, which means that he's returning to running *Pagoda* as part-time operation, after five years running it full time. Games will be running at 48 hour turnaround rather than 24, but he intends to continue processing all *Pagoda's* games. Indeed, he's starting three new games this month.



HISTORICAL ROLEPLAYING

Some of the **En Garde!** moderators mentioned in Patrick Gleeson's Overview last issue report that readers have been contacting them about their games. It's good to feel that your interest has been suitably stirred.

GM Trevor Gillard adds that he still has a few vacancies in his **Horse Guards En Garde!**, which seems a particularly lively version of the game. Tulip mania, anyone? Check out the website: http://horseguards.org/en_garde.html or contact Trevor directly at:

trevor.gillard@horseguards.org

GOOD NEWS

Our warmest congratulations to Keith and Julie Burnham (*Pagoda Games*) on the birth of their son, Jack William, who was born at 6:08 am on October 20th. Baby Jack, says his father, 'is raring to join a game of Godfather (too many backstabbers in WWIV!).'

Congratulations too go to Rob Harper and Sarah Callaghan (*State of Mind Games*). Whilst over in America last month, they became engaged. Rob's one of the few people in PBM capable of proposing whilst juggling on bended knee ...

CONVENTIONS



TOWERCON

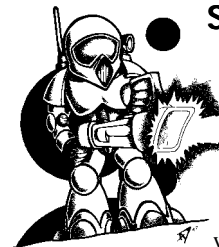
22 - 24 March 2002,
Claremont Hotel,
Blackpool, Lancashire.

TowerCon is an independent games convention held in Blackpool which is now in its 5th year. The event is held at the Claremont Hotel who provide most of the residential accommodation. **N.B.** The residential price includes accommodation, breakfast, a **four course dinner** and convention entry. Residents also get the run of the hotel including access to the gym, swimming pool and jacuzzi.

TowerCon aims to provide a gaming environment that is relaxed and friendly and caters to a variety of gaming types. Board Games, Freeform, RPG's and war gaming are all supported (CCG's are currently not supported due to space constraints).

There are also a few "unique" items - Glynn Mossop's *Gunfight* which is a great ice breaker at the convention, and the giant *Settlers of Catan* board on which our final of the Settlers competition is played. (Rumours of a Craggy Island variant remain unsubstantiated).

There is always a quiz on the first evening (the grand prize is you get to write the quiz for the following year). Failure to do so means that the quiz is written by the Convention Dictator which has delegates running out of the convention screaming at the difficulty levels.



SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

Lots of exciting news on the science fiction front.

Steve Arnott is now running three games of **Galactic Invasion 3**, an sf wargame which is based on the same system as

Battle of the Planets which Harlequin have just stopped running. Galactic Invasion 3 has two-week deadlines, and is run by email only. Oh, and the game is free! If you're interested, contact:

gi3@notreally.co.uk

Another sf wargame that's being relaunched is **Galaxy**, this time from the new firm *Rebus Games*. Galaxy does exist as an internet game, where it's often run for free by its various moderators. Rebus will be charging for it, however, because they're offering it to postal players as well as email ones. It's only a very low charge, though, and as a special introductory offer the start-up and first six turns will be free. Subsequent turns will be £1.50 each, and you can gain six turns credit for introducing friends to the game. Turnaround time will be about two weeks.

In Galaxy, you start with a single planet, and from this you can build up an empire to dominate the galaxy. Naturally, once the empty planets near you have been colonised, you come into contact with other players and need to fight or build alliances with them. It's a nice touch that players can design their own space-ships, which they'll use to transport colonists and industry to other planets, to battle against other players' ships, and to bomb other players' planets (so that they can re-colonise them). Dominic describes it as a game that offers 'diplomacy, tactics, economics and design'.

Rebus Games also join the Refugee Rescue Scheme, offering credit up to the value of 12 turns to players hit by a game fold.

Long-term readers will remember an old PBM favourite, the sf wargame **The Weapon**. Originally an American design, Jim Gibson of Harrow Games ran this for years in Britain and was highly regarded. If you're a fan, or if you're new to the game and would like to try it, you can do so now by email from the German group *Verein der Freunde E.d.S.* Their GM, Detlef Kraegenbrink, welcomes English-speaking players. There's a small turn charge, around 1.5 Euros, to cover the cost of purchasing the game.

The Weapon lasts between 15 and 25 turns. It uses either the neat system where the players each choose when the game will end and the moderator averages their choices, or else the players all decide that the game should end at 25 turns. It's a good game of its kind, and presents some nifty tactical opportunities.

More details from:

The_Weapon@Gmx.de

There are further details of the Verein der Freunde, under NEWS FROM GERMANY.

Pagoda Games report that the second US vs UK Historical Team game of **StarFleet Warlord** has just finished, with (wow!) a stunning victory for the UK side. This is a remarkable achievement considering the game has been running in the USA for several years longer than over here, so congratulations are in order for the UK team. Both sides are writing a mini-diary of this game, which will be available on the Pagoda Games website shortly. That now makes it 1-1 in the US vs UK stakes, and so everything is riding on EH5 which has been running for around eight turns now.

Pagoda have also been running a special weekly Die Hard game of SFW, which has a roughly 50/50 split of US and UK players. However the experience of the Americans has shone through in this game, and they hold four of the top five positions with just a handful of turns to go. 'It has been an exciting game to watch,' reports GM Keith Burnham, 'and the weekly pace has kept everyone on their toes.'

Pagoda's next regular game will be starting later in November, and will be a Last Man Standing game. To win, you will really have to fight to win the game, as no longer can you make a quick grab for sites when you get near the usual 80 site target.

KJC Games have just launched their new game, **Space Troopers**, which we previewed here last issue. Interestingly, they've decided to run this game for free. 'It is a bloody good game,' says KJC's Mica Goldstone, 'and we can easily justify charging to play it... It is our intention to use it as a lure to bring people into the hobby and hopefully seed at least some of them into our other games.'

This does mean that it's only available by email, though, to limit its running costs. KJC are encouraging their existing players to promote the game, by warning them that the game will only be run for free while it makes business sense to do so, so they must get recruiting.

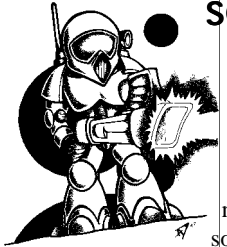
Space Troopers is an sf wargame, but it also offers adventuring elements, like quests with rescue missions and scouting patrols. Contact:

<http://www.kjcgames.com/stf.htm>

<http://www.kjcgames.com/spacetroopsignf.htm>

Also, *KJC* are now playtesting their revised version of Beyond the Stellar Empire, **Phoenix**. They've gone through the preliminary in-house testing, and have now got to the point where a few select players can get their hands on a test module universe, to hammer out any bugs.

After this, the next stage will be to incorporate BSE's current universe into the new frame. KJC have chosen to do this rather than to start again from scratch because the existing



SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

universe 'is so rich in history do anything else would be dumb'. Seems a reasonable decision!

However, the new design has changed some of the basic tenets of BSE, to improve the strategic level of game. There's a definite break from the former tactics, towards sieges and skirmishes. KJC are confident that the new, re-named version will allow for all the old rivalries of BSE, as well as opening up opportunities for new players, especially along the new-formed border regions.

BSE has been a long-running game, with many inherent strengths: it's good to see this prospect of a revival which will keep the old game's advantages and reduce its weaknesses.

Madhouse have just started playtesting their new 'pulp space opera', **Destiny**. They're offering playtest positions at £30 for the full 20-turn playtest period, which is the same system as they used to playtest *DungeonWorld*. Based on this experience, they're confident that their players are prepared to pay a reduced price to try out one of their new games. £1.50 a turn

isn't extortionate, compared with the £3.50 planned for the finished game. In return for this reduction, Madhouse require their playtesters to play to the end of the 20-turn period, and to comment on the game as they play it.

At this stage, only starship positions are available, though colony (and other) positions will be added as the playtest progresses. You'll own a starship and four characters. The playtest will continue into the finished game, so you can continue to play without interrupting your position: quite an advantage in an open-ended game.

You should have a copy of Madhouse's introductory booklet with this issue, so can learn more for yourselves from this. We like the way that the information is arranged, with supplementary notes to one side of the main presentation. What we're not too thrilled with, though, is its stipulation that playtesters aren't allowed to report on the game to *Flagship* while it's still in playtest.

Phoenix and *Destiny* will turn into very different games, despite sharing a science fiction basis. After all, Space is big enough. Go on, give them both a try. And tell us about them.

NEWS FROM GERMANY

This seems the suitable place to give further details of the *Verein der Freunde E.d.S.*, which we've mentioned earlier when reporting that they're moderating *The Weapon*.

They're a group of around 25 friends, from all over Germany, who have come together by playing a German game, **Evolution of the Stars (EdS)**. They get together to talk about games in Straelen (near the Dutch border), twice a year. They've decided to obtain the rights for a range of PBM games, including **Wallenstein**, **Germania** and **El Mythico** (all of which are still being reprogrammed), **The Weapon** and **EdS** (which are running now) and **Spiral Arm** (for which they don't yet have enough players). All these games are to be played by email.

I don't think we've mentioned EdS before, so will report here that it's a game for 17 players, which you start with one world and five ships. There are 445 planets spread over the game map, and the winning player has to have transformed a hundred of these planets to research. A planet can only fulfil one order per month - food, ore, uranium or research) - and of course it's necessary to compete with the other 16 players to be the first to reach the winning 100.

Their German-language website is:

<http://www:eds-verein.de>

If you want to ask questions, in German or English, Detlef Kraegenbrink offers his contact address at:

The_Weapon@Gmx.de



ZINES

We're adding a listing of amateur zines to *Galactic View*: both printed and email ones. If you know of more than we do, please get in touch!

For a detailed discussion of every zine and the games they run, you can't go wrong with a copy of John Harrington's **Mission from God**. The latest issue is now available price £1: see the ad on page 35.

Colin Forbes hasn't included **Infinite Threads** in his article about zines, because he's involved in its production, but we can safely say here that *Infinite Threads* is a nicely produced free zine, which comes out to a monthly schedule. Games are run by six moderators and include *Diplomacy* (and variants) along with other games that can be joined at any time. For instance, *Great White Hunter*, *Soapbox*, *Stockbroker* and *Next Lines*. Its unusual to find RPGs in a zine but *Infinite Threads* has two: *Bozisha Miraz* and the *Forty Four Nights of Amn*. Interested parties should check out the website:

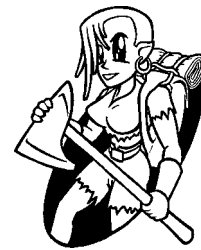
www.infinite-threads.co.uk

Flagship will welcome comments about zines and their games for inclusion in *Rumours from the Front*. There are masses of zines and fanzines out there, all dealing with games and gaming related activities, so we'd love to hear about them!

CRIME GAMES

Pagoda Games have had to postpone plans to launch the *Five Families* variant of **Godfather** until the new year. We'll save the details until then, but anyone wishing to try the regular version can sign-up for the new game starting in December.

We'll soon be publishing a diary of a Head 2 Head version of *Godfather*, and *Pagoda* are now able to offer this variant if there are any friends who wish to challenge each other. The game will be set on a 3*3 map, with NPC players filling the remaining wards. So far *Pagoda* have moderated four of these games, and each has had a very different outcome. Turns are fixed at only £2.50, and they can arrange for a complete pre-pay option if required.



ADVENTURE GAMES

Madhouse report that they've been busy adding new stuff to **DungeonWorld** over the last couple of months. A 'Royal Mission' plotline has been started in the

Frontier area and the Land of the Dead continues to make its malign influence known in a Grand Plot. The guilds have been upgraded and Heroic Monsters have been introduced. Plenty of new monsters and items have been added to the game, to be gradually worked into the lands in a realistic manner. New Necromantic magics, Vampire Clans, the Bloodhood (in Frontier) and many other clues and new phenomena are now present, to be discovered and explored.

Coming soon, Madhouse announce, are *Monster Skills*. They'll be introducing a whole range of skills for Monster leaders and their minions before Christmas, with Heroic Monster skills to follow soon after. They're also thinking about adding new adventurer skills in the next couple of months. And there's more to follow...

PLAYTESTS

Andrew Makinson is looking for beta testers for a new PBeM game called **Nations**. This is a non-fantasy wargame, in which you play the leader of a nation in a world that's currently maintaining an uneasy peace. But yes, the obvious impulse is to keep your own people happy by fighting and defeating the other nations ...

For more information contact:

domestos@rahrandelfsnet.co.uk

Check out our new website ...

www.pbmgames.com/flagship

CONVENTIONS & MEETS



Feel free to send us details of any conventions or meets that you know of which PBMers might enjoy. If you attend, we'd welcome reports on how they go, too.

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 planning to run a stall there ourselves, so if you're in the London area that day, come along and give us your support. A friendly reader will be running a game of Great White Hunter from the stall ... Other PBM GMs, including Madhouse, expect to be present on the day. 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 or contact Gameforce Ltd, 18-20 Bromell's Road, London SW4 0BG.

GAMES GAMES GAMES DAYS: Note the change of venue. Held on the second Saturday of each month, a day of games hosted by SFC Press at *The Duke of York, 35 New Cavendish St, London W1* from 12.30 onwards. Admission is free. Contact SFC Press Old Dover Road, London SE3 8SJ; email events@sfc.co.uk

THE MINDLESS BANQUET: Mindless Games will be holding their annual banquet at *The White Hart, Lenton on November 24th*. It sounds a splendid event, with lots of traditional fare and jollity; games will be played and costumes are encouraged. It's probably too late to book for this now if you're not already going, but we're happy to notice this sort of festive event. Besides, there's always next year.

MIDDLE EARTH WEEKEND: A long weekend game of Middle Earth is being organised in *Copenhagen*, from *Friday 18th Jan to Sun 21st Jan, 2002*. Harlequin announce that all players of Middle Earth are welcome - but please contact them in advance so that they can book you a place. On Saturday 19th January they will be holding a pubmeet for all players and anyone else who would like to enjoy the ambience of Copenhagen. As per usual, all welcome - the more the merrier.

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www.pbmgames.com/flagship



FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Exciting news is the launch of a new, open-ended fantasy roleplaying and powergame called **Aspects of Might** from *Silver Dreamer*. It's designed by Justin Parsler, and uses Madhouse's Nexus game engine to run turns once a week. Justin knows his stuff, and **Aspects** looks as if it has the potential to be a PBM blockbuster.

Note that it's a PBeM, not a postal game.

Interestingly, the game encourages a degree of co-operation between the players rather than outright competition. This is because it's set in a world which is only just recovering from a century of helpless barbarism after its deities (or the Aspects, as the game calls them) had withdrawn from it.

You play two or more characters, who have direct contact with one of the Aspects and whose objective is to work towards restoring civilisation now that the Aspects have returned. Your characters don't have to follow the same course together, to do this. Various paths are possible: building, farming, increasing your characters' personal abilities and skills, seeking political power, exploring and adventuring.

It's also possible to submit Feasibility Studies, which allow you to try to develop any project you wish, 'from blacksmiths to potent spells'.

Your characters can be chosen from any of the six races in the game: the High Men, who are the traditional rulers, the Gossenbecht, who specialise in magic, the burly Volkeenan, the half-faery Faelraker, the wild Wodemis and the Lirain who specialise in the lore. These make a useful change from the usual fantasy races.

The game's religious and magic system is unusual, too, in that it's based on the Tarot deck. There are 21 Aspects, too many to list in full, but to take a few random examples there's The Fool, The Magician, The Wheel of Fortune, The Hanged Man and The Tower. The Fool is impulsive and a wanderer, The Magician can channel magical energy, The Wheel of Fortune represents luck, both good and bad, and the cycle of life, The Hanged Man suffers gladly and The Tower offers destruction. Mysterious, yes, but altogether the varied Aspects hint at an entrancing range of potentialities.

The game is mixed moderated, with ten short orders per turn that get moderated by the computer and one free-form long order. Silver Dreamer expect to be able to take in new players as the game progresses, and will issue updates about the game's developments to help them. There's an e-group to cover the game.

This all sounds splendid, especially since Justin is a much-praised game designer who's worked for Silver Dreamer and Madhouse, which will have given him plenty of experience. He's aiming to make **Aspects of Might** a game which will be playable on many different levels.

Contact the SilverDreamer site for more details at

www.Silverdreamer.com

or for a free rulebook email

Silverdrea@aol.com

Mark Pinder's **Lands of Elvaria** has been running for many years now, and over this time we've been able to report the various ways in which he's continued to adapt and upgrade the game.

Mark's latest wheeze is a spin-off from **Elvaria**: it's a team game in which the player characters have been kidnapped from **Elvaria** by forces from a rival dimension opposed to the **Elvarians**. The characters then have to escape back to the world of **Elvaria** itself. When (or if!) they succeed, they can either retire or carry on in the open-ended version of **Elvaria**.

The plan is to put several players together in a dead-lined team, roleplaying a game of between six and ten positions. The first of these games has started now, and Mark has sent out the team material necessary for this. He says that previous experience of **Elvaria** is not essential, but that it may be useful for newcomers to play the original game of **Elvaria** first, as he isn't yet sure what the demand will be for further examples of this variant.

The game system is the same as that of **Elvaria** itself, but the chance to play together as a team in a different world sounds like fun.

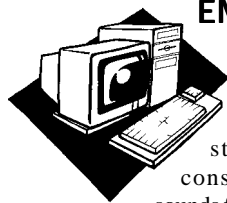
Some sad news is that Bill Heron of *Nova Games* has decided to close his dragon game, **Mandragora**, because of real-world pressures. Players have been informed, and it's a clean fold. Our reviewer was enjoying the game.

It's consolatory that Bill won't be dropping the concept completely. He has plans for a game using some of **Mandragora**'s ideas, that'll be totally run by computer. He also intends to work up the setting as an add-on for the excellent new D20 open source roleplaying system (as featured in a games shop near you), once he has enough spare time. We await developments with interest.

Regular players in Antony Dunks' **Xott** games already know that there's to be a small increase in prices from 1st December. Charges remain low, however, and the regular discounts for bulk purchasing of credit and continued play in the game(s) is unaffected.

And as a pleasantly sinister note to end on, Chris Morris of *Ulaiddh Games* announces 'a bit of a milestone' for his fantasy game set in the modern world, **Einstein's Lot** - 'the first adjudication containing Akkadian (one sentence!). When I say Einstein's Lot is about the influence of the past on the present, I mean it. I think the player coped with Akkadian.'

Hmm, by legging it like billy-ho or by standing firm? Chris didn't say ...



EMAIL AND WEB-BASED GAMING

Here's a light-hearted game which may not exactly fit modern standards of wildlife conservation, but which sounds fun nevertheless. After all, nothing leathery, scaly or furry really gets injured in its implementation.

Great White Hunter is a free safari game from *Steve Arnott*. It resembles 'Battleships' in its basic design, but with the player characters setting out on safari and scoring points by successfully hitting snakes, monkeys, bears and lions. Oh, and it's a nice touch that they can also juggle the leadership of the points table by firing at each other. The maps are pretty neat, too.

Contact details are:

Website: <http://www.notreally.co.uk/gwh>

Email: gwh@notreally.co.uk

Greg Lindahl has made a couple of updates to his listing of games:

www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pbm_list

GMs can create an announcement for a game, which will last for sixty days and enable them to inform players of a new season or new features for the game.

There's also a way to mark those games like **Atlantis** and **Galaxy** which can be run by anyone who wants to moderate them. Look for the keyword 'opensource'.

We usually cover only turn-based games in *Flagship*, but of course there are plenty of PBeM games which offer continuous play. For **Gaslight**, you need to email at least twice a week, and can play more often. Twice a week sounds manageable, so we're including details because this seems the sort of scenario that'll appeal to roleplayers.

Gaslight is a Victorian horror and mystery game, for six to ten players. There are two games running at present, with two different moderators; each has his own style. You work in teams of two or three, but sometimes with everyone together, to investigate bizarre events.

You'll need to be fairly experienced at PBeMs to play, but lurkers are welcome. The website can be found at:

<http://www.gaslight-pbem.com/index.php3>

Similarly, **Battle of Vidonia** is a free open-ended game with a fantasy setting which includes unusual races and duelling mages. It's possible to rise to power in one of the world's kingdoms, or just to go adventuring. Again, this doesn't seem to be a turn-based game, but it sounds quite appealing. Contact details are:

<http://vidonia.freesevers.com>
aelsius@hotmail.com

Ryan S Johnson of the *Guild of Blades Publishing Group* is organising games of the boardgame **1483** online. He's discovered a huge demand, with over 400 potential players. Game 6 will have been

launched by the time this issue hits your doormats, and it's possible to lurk while you're on the waiting list. Interestingly, the Guild of Blades has discovered that some adaptations have had to be made to fit the boardgame for PBeM play.

Information from:

<http://www.guildofblades.com>

Closer to our usual PBM games is **Centre-Earth**, a play-by-email fantasy powergame from its Australian moderator, *Giles Bertram*. Set in the fantasy world of Arda, Centre-Earth is free and hand-moderated. You control one of the world's nations, with each turn representing a month of game time. The turnaround is slowish for a PBeM, at five-six weeks, but readers who are used to postal gaming will find this acceptable, especially as there's a lot of diplomacy going on between turns. Centre-Earth hasn't been running for long - seven or eight turns at present - but there aren't any vacant places at the moment because Giles is being careful not to take more players than he can handle. He stresses that he's running the game in his spare time, to a high level of detail, so it's a game that won't have a speedy turnaround.

Check the website if you're interested. This will give you most of the information you need about the world and character creation, while there's also a link to the e-group for player discussion:

www.penalva.net/~serge/centre_earth/ardacountries.html

Juan Varela runs a couple of PBeM games of the turn-based fantasy game system, **Atlantis**. One version, which Juan is calling the 'Atlantis Blitz', has turns at every two days. There's also a weekly game, with more emphasis on role-playing, which has a story that will develop as the game progresses.

There is still space for more factions in both games, and both are free. You can find more information at:

<http://people.ne.mediaone.net/javar/index.htm>

Mark Pinder reports that many of his current players in **Lands of Elvaria** have internet access are using MSN Messenger to conference on line. As a result, anyone with MSN who has any questions to ask while on line, rather than waiting for an email reply, can contact him at:

Wilecoyoteuk@hotmail.com

Mark also has a helpful new website:

<http://communities.msn.co.uk/elvaria>

'How's that for kicking Elvaria kicking and screaming into the 21st century?' he asks.

Mark also invites anyone who's interested in lurking to link into his site to watch the players are up to, or to send him an email to be put on the mailing list.

Peter Rzechorzek runs the tribal game **Tribe Net** from Australia, and announces that he's

recently opened a whole new continent for beginners. There are over eighty existing players, with around forty of them from the USA.

As you'd guess from its name, this is a PBeM tribal game, with plenty of detail and diplomacy. It's mixed-moderated, and runs to two-week deadlines.

The main email contact is the one we show in Galactic View:

tribenet@netspace.net.au

But Peter has just sent a listing of some player-run websites, which have links to other Tribe Net sites:

<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Nebula/9546/index.html>

<http://sporken.home.att.net/private/Tribes/tribes.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Ring/7123/index.html>

They'll give a lively impression of what Tribe Net offers, but Peter warns that because they belong to players, the material on them is sometimes a little out of date. So don't rely on them for the latest rules.

David Callan reminds us of the free game he runs, **Gorlos**. It's a play by email, fantasy empire-building game with two turns a week - Wednesday and Saturday. The game is open ended and players join and leave as they wish. At the moment there is no web-site, so contact David at:

gorlos@netcomuk.co.uk

Lots of *Flagship* readers are interested in strategy gaming, so you'll be pleased to hear that enthusiasts have set up a new internet site:

<http://www.strategygamers.org>

The plan is for it to include all types of strategy games, as long as they can be played via the internet. Obviously, this includes PBeM games, so the site sounds like a useful one. Give it a try!

Middle Earth Competition

Thinking of starting-up in Harlequin's **Middle Earth PBM**? Here's a competition for you! Answer the following questions correctly and win an additional three free turns with your startup (normally £10 including 2 turns).

- 1) Who plays Gandalf in the forthcoming film?
- 2) What was the name of Bilbo's sword?
- 3) How many Black Riders attacked the Hobbits at Weathertop?

Send your answers in to the *Flagship* office, please, by January 1st. All correct answers will be entered in a draw to find the winner. Remember to include your name and address!

Middle Earth PBM

An in-depth Guide for Beginners

JEFFERY DOBBERPUHL offers aid with this great PBM game, with additional material by COLIN FORBES ...

PART I - What is Middle Earth Play By Mail?

'In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit...' - The Hobbit

Middle Earth Play By Mail (MEPBM) is a complex game inspired by the works of J R R Tolkien, specifically *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It was created by Game Systems Inc (GSI) and is currently moderated by Harlequin Games.

Although on the surface, MEPBM is merely a strategy game, there is more to it than that, including: character development, nation management, economics, diplomacy, and warfare. MEPBM has variants, set in either the year 1650, 2950 (War of the Ring) or the Fourth Age. There is also a 'mini-module' called Battle of the Five Armies. This discussion will focus on 1650 and 2950 games.

Each player represents one nation or political faction in Middle Earth. These players' nations interact with the game environment and rules solely through a number of characters, issuing two orders to each character per turn (such as 'March your army to Minas Tirith' or 'Talk to Smaug the dragon'). The characters' success in carrying out the orders, combined with random events and the actions of the other 24 players, determines a player's ultimate success. The strategy comes into play by manoeuvring armies, assassins, wizards and heroes across the realm of Middle Earth.

However, a closer analysis reveals that MEPBM is as much a game of economics as it is of strategy. The successful player will often be the player who can accomplish the most with the fewest orders. For example, if two players each have eight characters, each player then has sixteen orders to issue per turn. The player who manages to accomplish the most with those sixteen orders will be in much better standing in the game. Further, the game requires management of the resources of each player's nation. A nation can actually go bankrupt, and be run out of the game by lack of funds! Depending on how you manage your resources, the costs and sales prices of production (such as timber, food or steel) will fluctuate from turn to turn.

How it all works

At the start of the game, each player receives eight characters, representing heroes of that player's nation. By giving each hero up to two orders per turn, you manage and control your nation.

Each order has a varying chance of success. This chance is based upon, among other things, how talented a character is at doing the sort of action ordered, how difficult the order is to carry out, environmental factors (such as enemy actions and the economy) and of course, random chance. Even the simplest of orders can fail!

Obviously, the more characters you control, the more you can accomplish. How efficiently you use the available orders will directly increase the odds of successfully managing your nation. Therefore, it is very important that you write out your orders, review and revise your orders, and then re-read your orders before sending them in. It is not unusual for such a review to reveal errors or better ways of achieving the

desired goal.

All orders must reach Harlequin Games the day before the turn is run. This gives the moderator time to look through and spot any obvious errors - if he finds an error he will contact you, but only if the orders are received on time! If you fail to get your orders in on time, your turn will be 'Special Serviced'. A Special Service turn means that a predetermined set of orders is implemented, based upon the character's highest Skill rank. All characters will issue the order Refuse Personal Challenge, while Commanders will Recon, Agents will Scout Hex, Emissaries will Uncover Secrets and Mages will attempt to Find Artifacts. Obviously, a Special Serviced turn is less than desirable.

...You must cooperate if victory is to be yours!

Winning the game

There are two types of 'wins' in MEPBM.

First (and most importantly), there is a team win. This means that either good has defeated evil (no Dark Servant players remain in the game) or evil has vanquished good (no Free Peoples players remain in the game), or one of the two sides has successfully thrown the One Ring into Mount Doom - or alternatively given it to Sauron! Note that a Neutral player cannot win.

Secondly, there is an individual winner on any given team. You receive victory points based on how powerful your nation is compared to all the other nations. Victory points are *not* calculated on how successful a nation is in combat, how many enemies it has vanquished or how many enemy characters it has killed. The specific list of comparable victory conditions is Population Centers, Armies, Characters and Wealth. You will receive between 100 and 500 points for each of these categories. Additionally, each nation receives five Victory Conditions at the game start. These never change. Each condition successfully obtained, and maintained, by the end of the game adds 100 points to the nation's victory point total.

... the more characters you control, the more you can accomplish ...

While you should not lose sight of the big picture (after all, it does no good to satisfy all five victory conditions if your team has lost the game), the victory conditions can provide a solid template for how to proceed on a turn by turn basis. For example, if a nation receives the condition 'Hold a population center named xxxx-ville at location abcd', then it may make some sense to plan on getting that population center in the grand scheme of things. That said, team play should always come first! Finally, if your nation manages to dispose of the One Ring, you will receive an additional 200 points.

Once the game is won, Harlequin Games will inform the players of various statistics that were achieved during the game. These statistics include most character kills, highest rank (for each skill) and highest challenge rank.

Middle Earth at a glance

Fantasy wargame from Harlequin Games. £10 for startup + 2 turns, with further turns at £3.90.

PART II - The Opening Moves

'...we who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world' - Lord of the Rings, I

MEPBM is a team game. You must co-operate if victory is to be yours! While there is nothing to stop you pursuing your own individual goals and strategies, if your team does not unify against the enemy, it is more than probable that you will end up on the losing side. As a member of a team, you need to contribute what you can: armies, characters, plans, resources. If the members of a team are willing to work with each other, their odds of victory will increase dramatically.

The first thing your team needs to do, upon getting the start up sheets, is to establish a method of easily contacting all the other players. The easiest and least expensive method is email. It is not uncommon for players to establish a special email account just for receiving MEPBM messages. Sometimes this can produce heavy email traffic: a prolific team can easily generate fifty messages a day! Another alternative is a community website where you can upload your turns for the rest of the team to review. More public, but important for players who have joined on their own, are the various messages boards (such as the one run at www.middleearthgames.com). Of course, there is always the phone or good old letter-writing! As a last resort, you can send notes through the game via Harlequin. Ideally these should be via email or on 3x5 cards - you'll usually only use

these in a game you have joined as a Neutral. Speaking of Neutrals, if you are in a game where the five Neutral nations are not pre-aligned (Harlequin run both sorts of games) then it is vitally important to send a friendly message to all of the Neutrals! You start with a team of ten playing against another team of ten. There are five Neutral nations who can aid or thwart your plans for world domination - neglect them at your peril.

Forming a strategy

Strategic planning establishes your goals and is critical to the success of any team of players. Economics, military targets, intelligence gathering and espionage all need to be discussed by your team and agreed upon as soon as possible. Coordination by the players on achieving these goals and implementing the strategy, will increase the results and enjoyability for them all. Most campaigns have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The strategy set forth at the beginning will determine what stratagems are available during the rest of the war. Players of Pool will be familiar with the concept of a 'leave', in which you are less concerned with the shot you are taking, than with what the table will look like after the shot is complete. This is the mentality a team must take towards forming the initial strategy. You will find strategy discussions are much aided by referring to an up-to-date map. There are various utilities freely available via the Middle Earth websites which will allow you to keep track of the changing situation in Middle Earth. Often one person on a team will offer to co-ordinate this sort of thing and share the information with the rest of the team.

Economic goals

A team's economic goals must include supporting the economically disadvantaged nations, consolidating natural resources and engaging in economic war against the enemy. In order to support economically disadvantaged nations, the team will have to take stock on a turn-by-turn basis of which particular nations are in danger of being unable to implement their part of the overall team strategy. This may be due to losses of population centres, unlucky production, or the need to support large armies or skilled characters. Teams will have to decide 'How do we keep so-and-so in the game?'

Generally the answer is in the form of direct cash transfers of gold. However, any product can be sent, and there will be times when sending a load of food may be better than a straight gold transfer. At other times it may be advisable to swap some population centres around. The idea of

this is that while front-line nations do battle, the more protected nations can create and improve population centres, with a view to transferring them to the front-line nations. This links with the consolidation of natural resources. Do the Northmen need bronze, steel and mithril to toughen their armies against the invading Long Rider, Blind Sorcerer, Dog Rider and others? In this case, mineral-rich nations should be transferring bronze, steel and mithril to the Northmen's army recruiting centres. Similarly, it is common for the Dark Servants



to purchase and send timber to the Dragon Lord and Witch King.

Merely keeping team mates in the game and active is only half of the economic battle. The team must decide how it will use the market place to help defeat the enemy. You may decide to keep buying out a particular product to increase its price, or your team may decide to buy out a product to deny the enemy access to it. This can be devastating! If you are about to invade an enemy who is lightly fortified, imagine the shock if you buy out the entire stock of timber so that the foe cannot build any walls to keep you out!

Finally, your team may decide to spend as much gold as they can each turn to keep market prices low, or to hoard as much as they can to inflate market prices. Hand in hand with this, it is essential that some planning is put into where the team should place new population centres. A quick look at the map shows even the novice that the Dark Servants have only limited room to grow in Mordor. A Dark Servant team that divides up the available hexes at the start will find their emissaries give far fewer wasted orders as they try to place camps. Alternatively, stealing certain hex locations for your team, such as the Gap of Rohan, prevents enemies from exploiting them for themselves.

In summary therefore, at game start your team needs to decide what part economics will play in your campaign. Thought needs to be given to developing the resource-poor nations and to keeping the enemy from fully using the marketplace. Finally, an allocation of building sites should be undertaken.

Middle Earth PBM

Middle Earth is a titanic struggle between Good and Evil set in the world of J.R.R. Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit'.

Should Aragorn have led the armies of the Free People in a suicide attack on Minas Morgul or should he have guarded the Forests of Lorien? Were the Nazgul wasting their time chasing Hobbits when they could have been planning to assassinate Gandalf? What if Saruman had acquired the One Ring?

Middle Earth allows you to control the actions of characters like Boromir, Thorin, Legolas, Galadriel and the nine Nazgul. Others, such as Gandalf, Bilbo, Gollum and Sauron have their own goals, but may be convinced to help you.

Lead mighty armies, wage secret and subterfugal war, solve riddles, sack citadels, manipulate the markets. Cast fiery spells, battle dragons, and carve a path to glory through the ranks of your enemies.

A team game, you must either take your place on the Council of Light, else serve the forces of evil as a Dark Servant to battle for control of the lands of Middle Earth. There are currently more than 1000 players competing in over 75 games, whilst new games start every week. With its own newsletter, websites and a monthly pubmeet in London, when you start playing you join not only a game but a whole community.



Office A, 340 North Road,
Cardiff CF14 3BP,
Phone: 029 2091 3359
Fax: 029 2062 5532
me@middleearthgames.com
www.middleearthgames.com



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Military considerations

Your nation will start with a number of armies. Typically these are made up of a mixture of troops. Give careful consideration where to send these armies. In establishing military targets, the team must understand what resources they can bring to bear where. Careful analysis of the various player maps, together with recon reports of enemy troop movements is critical to successful planning. Classically, North Gondor can expect the Dark Servants to do everything they can to take Minas Ithil and Osgiliath - both are just too central and too close to Mordor to allow North Gondor to keep them! Similarly, the Witch King has to expect that by around turn 6 or 7, both Mount Gram and Mount Gundabad will be assaulted by every Free People army available.

This is probably the area that teams focus on the most, as it is the most obvious method of winning the war. However, you should also be discussing whether the team intends to use a 'scorched earth' strategy (attempting to destroy enemy population centres), as opposed to an 'occupation' strategy (attempting to control enemy population centres). Finally, good military strategy will include a discussion of other aspects of warfare such as what areas to fortify, what harbours and ports to drop, what bridges to hold.

When it comes to recruitment, it is important to realise that your initial armies will not last forever. In almost all circumstances you must begin to recruit new armies as soon as possible. Don't worry about any of the various troop types except heavy infantry and heavy cavalry - none of the others are really worth the money or resources.

The initial team moves should be to consolidate military power at points where it can be further projected against the enemy. As an example, look at the map of Middle Earth. For all practical purposes, the Witch King in 1650 is fairly isolated - and in 2950 there are even fewer Dark Servant population centres west of the Misty Mountains. A common strategy for the Free Peoples is therefore to concentrate on reducing the power of the outlying Dark Servants while the more front-line Free Peoples (eg North Gondor) operate a holding action. If the Free Peoples are successful in Angmar (and quickly) this frees up a lot more forces to swing south towards Mordor. Similarly, the Dark Servants will classically look at taking the Rhun Sea area out of the hands of the Free Peoples. Once taken, The Dark Servants can easily project their military might into the forests of Mirkwood, possibly even into the Misty Mountains and beyond ...

Characters

At game start you have eight characters. However, you may immediately name up to four more - and you should aim to do so as soon as possible. Remember, more characters equals more orders! What sort of characters you name will vary according to your position, inclination and the needs of the team. However you should probably consider naming at least one 30-point emissary and a similarly skilled agent - if not two of each. More characters will become available as you progress through the game.

Intelligence gathering

Many teams have problems establishing an effective intelligence gathering strategy. This is unfortunate because it is the linchpin that holds together the other strategies. Any information learned about the enemy is *good* information. For example, learning that the Dwarves desire to own artifact 60 at game end may give the team a method of tracking dwarfish characters. To design and implement an intelligence gathering strategy, the team needs to dedicate mages to learning artifact and character location spells. Other characters need to be trained for recon and scouting orders. Finally, a prioritization of targets is necessary so as to avoid duplication of efforts. Once again, good early communication is the key.

Your team will need to examine the Artifact list carefully and decide which to go after. Although details of artifact powers are not listed in the rules, there are lists commonly available from the various websites (or one of your team-mates). It is not unusual for both sides to be searching for the Ring of Wind on turn 1, for example. Most teams probably go first for the so-called 'agent artifacts', followed by the artifacts that allow

access to Spirit Mastery. As to agents, teams will probably use scouting and recon in the early game to find out what basic military strategy the enemy is attempting. Are the South Gondorians loading up ships to attack the Quiet Avenger? Does the Dragon Lord have sufficient troops to protect Goblin Gate? Finally, many teams completely neglect the use of Palantir as an information gathering tool. This is a foolish waste of a unique resource!

Espionage and counter-espionage

Teams need to have a good espionage and counter-espionage strategy. They need to decide whether to have starting agents steal from team mates in order to train more quickly. Further, what enemy nations will the team try to steal gold from and in which enemy nations will the team try to assassinate characters? The team needs to contemplate what steps will be taken to get a company of mages with the 'curses' spells together, and where to send that company each turn. Additional consideration must be taken of where the team should send highly skilled emissaries to try to influence away enemy population centres. And of course, the strategy is not complete until the team decides on ways to deal with the enemy's agents, mages and emissaries. For example, many Neutral players forget that unless they have their relations DOWNGRADED with another nation, all of their population centres are vulnerable to emissaries, regardless of whether there is an army in the hex or not. It is critical to the mid and end games for teams to be working on a good espionage and counter-espionage strategy. Players should look at what steps are necessary to build up a number of good agent companies and emissary companies quickly. Further, the long slow process towards forming a curse squad (a company of mages, all of whom have learned various Spirit Mastery spells) needs to start early on.

Nations' goals

Just as each team needs a strategy for success, so does each nation. Upon receiving the initial setup sheet, you should carefully evaluate what resources your nation can bring to bear, as well as what resources are lacking. Itemize the spells that were randomly selected for mages, as well as random character starting locations. Determine how many characters can be devoted solely to the team effort and how many must be reserved for the day-to-day running of the nation. It is also important to decide whether the nation can be consolidated by ignoring outlying population centres, placing new ones centrally, pulling characters in from single locations and unifying them in armies and companies, and massing resources at one or two population centres. Decisions need to be made both in terms of what the nation needs to do immediately, but also where it needs to be in the future. Should armies be raised, moved or abandoned? Are certain starting characters just dead weight? What are the immediate military and character goals? Once these questions are answered (or at least guessed at), the orders necessary to run the nation successfully will be much easier to select and you can run your realm with confidence!

Sources for more information

Harlequin / MEPBM Games, Office A, 340 North Road, Cardiff, CF14 3BP, UK
 Phone: (044) 29 2091 3359 (10-6.30pm GMT weekdays)
 Fax: (044) 29 2062 5532 (24 hours)
 Email: me@middleearthgames.com
 Website: www.middleearthgames.com
 This website has links to a number of other sites, including:
 Harlequin's Middle Earth PBM site - designed to explain PBM to the newcomer
 * <http://www.middleearth.co.uk>
 Bobbin's new 1650 MiddleEarthPBM.co.uk
 * <http://www.middleearthpbm.co.uk>
 The Facade MEPBM site, with a great image of a ME map
 * <http://www.lakenet.com/~attorney/runestone/keywords.htm>
 (Jeffery Dobberpuhl's site).
 * Baerauble's site - with an archive of all Mouth of Sauron e-zines
<http://www.geocities.com/baerauble/mepbminf.htm>

Also, don't forget to read 'The Hobbit', 'Lord of the Rings', and 'The Silmarillion'!

Choosing a PBM Game

Looking for Challenges, Power, Someone to Outwit?

CAROL MULHOLLAND offers a few guidelines...

WE PUBLISH the latest Flagship Ratings this issue, so now seems the time to say something about the games that are listed and to describe how I use our Ratings to give advice to newcomers. I hope that this'll interest experienced readers as well. O Experienced-Player-of-Many-Games, what sort of advice would *you* give to a newcomer? Not just 'Take up this rather convenient position that'll support mine,' I'm sure!

When a someone asks me about choosing a PBM game, I'll start off by saying how wonderful it is that there are plenty to choose from. After all, this is what I love most about PBM, myself. Then I try to narrow the area down: 'What sort of background would you enjoy?', 'Do you want a game you can win, or a game you can carry on playing indefinitely?' and 'Do you fancy a game where you ought to contact the other players?' Having got some idea of what to look for, I check the latest set of Ratings, to see what players themselves have recommended.

Of course, the Ratings should always be treated with some caution, as the votes are subjective, and can't give the whole story. One man's meat is another man's poison. Sometimes I'll suggest a new game which hasn't made it into the Ratings yet. Still, they are a pretty good guide to which games are active, and what these games offer.

The games are listed according to Anticipation, which works well, but it may be GM Quality and Value for Money that are more vital considerations for somebody new. Depth and Interaction matter as well, of course, but they're a matter of personal preference.

Oh, and before I continue, I'd better add that although I've based my comments on the Ratings, you should be able to follow this article without needing to keep turning to the Ratings pages.

Choosing an Adventure Game

Unless newcomers have a decided preference for wargaming or sports simulations, I usually advise them to try an Adventure Game first of all. Adventure Games are open-ended, so won't endanger a new player too soon, and they offer plenty of things to do and ways to contact the other players.

This issue, it's good to see **DungeonWorld** heading the list of Adventure Games with 71 (yes, seventy-one!) votes, because a game that has a lot of votes often gains a lower average than a game with a handful of devoted players. Madhouse's game rates at 7.55 for Anticipation, 8.13 for GM Quality, 6.84 for Interaction, 6.79 for Depth and 7.46 for Value for Money, and is clearly giving a lot of players a lot of fun. No hesitation in recommending **DungeonWorld** then, maybe via Madhouse's free version, *The Broken Lands*.

KJC's **Quest** hasn't done as well this year, but I'm sure that Quest is another game that's good for newcomers and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this. It'll be interesting to see how the newly updated version of Quest gets rated, over the next couple of years.

Choosing a Fantasy Wargame

Lots of you *love* playing fantasy wargames, and some of the most exciting PBM games come into this category. Harlequin Games' **Middle Earth PBM** is the clear winner, in a close contest. Like **DungeonWorld**, **Middle Earth** has gathered plenty of votes (43), and again these haven't pulled it down. It's gained 8.29 for Anticipation, 8.39 for GM Quality, 7.24 for Depth, 7.70 for Interaction and 6.90 for Value for Money. While **Middle Earth** isn't a cheap game, its materials are gorgeous. I'd recommend this for newcomers because the chance to lead a nation in Tolkein's world has a tremendous appeal beyond PBM itself. There's the imminent film, too!

But I wouldn't praise a game just because of its subject-matter: I know that **MEPBM** is a good design in its own right. Also, as a team game, it's a good way to meet other PBMs without being out on your own.

It's impossible to select just one other recommendation from the rest of the Fantasy Wargames, because there are plenty in the whole list that a newcomer will enjoy. One point about the other games, though, is that some of them need a lot of players to get started, so I'd advise newcomers to check with the GMs first, and then join the game that'll get going first.

Looking down the list, **Overlord** comes second in Anticipation at 8.01 and has a high Rating for GM Quality at 8.82, so a puzzled newcomer will be as cherished here as it's possible to be in a fantasy wargame. **Kings of Karadon** comes next, and rates highly for Depth at 8.24. It is fairly new, and has gained plenty of fans. **Serim Ral** follows - ah, I've met PBMs who play nothing but **Serim Ral**! This game needs a large number of players, but with a choice of three firms running it you should be able to join at some point. All the votes came in from players with Harlequin's version. Next comes **Adventurer Kings**, an old favourite which was ground-breaking in its day and still has plenty to offer. **War of the Dark God** only gets three votes because it's fairly new, but it rates highest (at 9.00) for Value for Money and like **Middle Earth**, it has the advantage of being a team game. **Legends** is a complex game, so could be more suitable for players with some PBM experience than for newcomers, but there are newcomers who'll appreciate its depth. **Lizards** is a light-hearted game that's pretty easy to learn, and has the nice twist that it's possible to recover from an apparently weak position in a way that will astonish your opponents. Magical lizards may not have quite the same appeal for play as kings and wizards, but **Lizards** is still a neat game for a newcomer.

Choosing a Wargame

Of course, not everyone wants to cast spells in a game, and a wargaming experience can be a particularly vivid one. I'd ask whether the newcomer has played table-top wargames before choosing a game, here.

I've got a problem in this section, in that my husband runs **Crisis!**, but please note that our Ratings Editor is impartial. I hope you'll think I've been fair.

Agema's **La Gloire du Roi** is a strong favourite, at 8.93 for Anticipation, 8.30 for GM Quality, 9.30 for Depth, 8.42 for Interaction and 7.33 for Value for Money. It's played against an historical background, of Europe in the 17th century, but of course players' actions soon make the action differ from that described in the history books. Because **LGdR** is open ended, I was tempted to place it as a powergame, but GM Richard Watts says that it's both a powergame and a wargame and that it's played by wargamers, so I'll stick with Tim's category.

Richard Miles' **Squad Leader** comes second, with high ratings for Anticipation (8.14) and Value for Money as well (8.86), though what looks a low amount of Interactivity (2.57). I don't know a lot about this game, as we've not received many comments on it for Rumours: so if you're playing it, would you like to write it up for Flagship? We described it in issue 82's Spokesmen, and from what we said there it sounds as if **Squad Leader** will appeal to those of you who've been enjoying 'Band of Brothers' on TV. There are 12 players, who each control a squad of soldiers - British, American or German - engaged in close combat with opposing forces in the campaign after the D-Day landings. It's hand-moderated and is a non-glossy, tactical game, but none the worse for that. Looks to me as if it'll suit newcomers who already have some table-top

wargaming experience.

Crisis! is fairly easy to play and doesn't need wargaming experience. **Company Commander**, which follows it on the list, is a highly detailed game, which will suit an experienced wargamer. **Napoleonic Battles** seems likely to appeal to table-top wargamers. I think that KJC's **Warlord** may be a good introduction to PBM for a newcomer with little previous experience of wargaming, even though its position isn't a high one. Or, maybe KJC's **It's a Crime!**? It's an old game, but should still make a good introduction to PBM.

It's strange that **World War IV** doesn't appear in this year's Ratings since it's an old favourite, but it is still running and I'd certainly suggest it for someone who wants a game of some depth.

Choosing a Power Game

Powergames are open-ended games which offer the chance to use your diplomatic and strategic skills to rise in power and to maintain your position. It takes patience and determination to do well in powergames, so they're not suitable for casual play, but they can be very absorbing. Are powergames suitable for newcomers? Yes, if you're suitably tough-minded, because powergames, with their depth and intrigue, are ideally suited to turn-based gaming.

Silver Dreamer's **Absolute Fantasy** appears heads the list, at 7.98 for Anticipation, 7.65 for GM Quality, 7.56 for Depth, 4.70 for Interaction and 7.01 for Value for Money. If you'd like to try the game, Silver Dreamer can accept new players. **Tribes of Crane** comes a close second with the splendid GM rating of 9.63, and 8.95 for Depth, but unfortunately it's a waiting list if you want to try it. Agema's **Assyria's End** is set in the Ancient world and Harlequin's **Crack of Doom** has a fantasy setting. Interesting Times' **Primvs inter Pares** isn't scoring as well as it used to: I suspect that this may be a carry-over from a period of uncertainty about its moderation, and expect that its ratings will improve now that this doubt has been settled.

Choosing a Roleplaying Game

While it's good to see State of Mind's **Chevia Chronicles** earning 8.22 for Anticipation, 8.90 for GM Quality, 7.64 for Depth, 7.43 for Interaction and 8.33 for Value for Money, the unfortunate bit is that the game can't take new players because it's drawing to its close.

Richard Burd's **Terran III** suffers from time delays - Richard runs it for free - and newcomers could only join the waiting list. Things brighten up if we count **En Garde!** as an historical Roleplaying Game, however. Only one of the two listed in the Ratings is still running, but last issue's Overview discussed the various En Garde! games that are available. So I'd draw on the information in that article for anyone who wants to play a roleplaying game, and I'd also look back at the first instalment of Kain's guide to roleplaying games, which appeared in issue 92.

Choosing a Science Fiction Game

Crusader Games' **Star Empires III** tops the listing at 8.34 for Anticipation, an excellent 9.26 for GM Quality, 8.43 for Depth, 7.26 for Interaction and 8.60 for Value for Money. Pagoda's **StarFleet Warlord** is a detailed sf wargame rather than an open-ended game like Star Empires, so the choice of game depends mainly on which type players are looking for.

KJC's **BSE II** is trailing way behind at present, but KJC are working on their new version of the game, **Phoenix**, which ought to be worth trying: one aspect of BSE which I like is the importance of its factions, which are a useful incentive for long-term players to assist newcomers. And there's Madhouse's **Destiny** in the offing, too ...

Choosing a Sports Game

I'd like more sports games to appear in the Ratings in future, but those we've got are an interesting bunch. Dracs Games are well-supported by their players, with **Away the Lads** heading the football section way beyond the other football games, thanks to three sets of very high votes. There's no room for new players, though, so I can't suggest it for

newcomers. Dracs **Fallen at the First** and **A Day at the Races** are also well fancied as horse-racing games. But to get back to football, **Kickabout** does pretty well, especially for Value for Money. This is a highly detailed game, so I'd recommend it for players who love to work with football stats. KJC's **Extra Time** doesn't do well, but it does have the advantage of a basic and an advanced version, so I'd consider this for a newcomer who wants to feel his way in the basic version first. We do need more games represented here.

Finally, a sports game that can't really be included with the others because it deals with fantasy creatures rather than human beings, but which is worth mentioning nevertheless, is Madhouse's **Mortis Maximus**. I had an impression that I've mainly heard about it as a playtest. So I asked GM Steve Tierney, who chortles that Mortis has been running commercially for six years and that it's Mortis 2, the upgrade, which has been in playtest. The happy news is that it's not in playtest any more, and is presently free to play by email (with an option to charge next year). I'm not sure which version the Ratings votes refer to, of course.

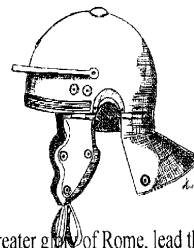
And then ...

I always suggest that a newcomer should enquire about two or three games, not just one. Log onto the moderators' websites, or send them an SAE. Ask them a few questions if you like. You could enquire about where to find hints and tips, maybe? The most important question of all to ask, of course, is when you'll be able to start playing!

Finally, many thanks to all of you who send in your ratings: they really are valuable for helping newcomers to get to grips with an otherwise bewildering array of possible games.

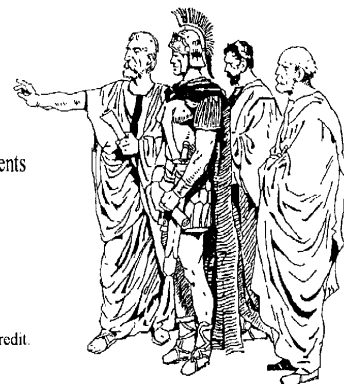
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INTERESTING TIMES:

Quest GME

It's a new version of an old favourite: so what do its players think? ...

JONATHAN SMITH and FRANZ BERTHILLIER in a two-headed review ...

QUEST ITSELF is a well-known game which has been running for years. So how should we best present KJC's revised version, **Quest GME** (the Game Master Edition) in *Flagship*? As an experiment, we invited the players to send us their opinions about the game.

Jonathan Smith starts off ...

An article on Quest GME probably needs to cater for two main groups: people who have played, and understand what Quest is, and those who don't.

As a general overview, Quest is basically a roleplaying PBM game. It has worlds of various game speeds, depending on how much you want to play, such as a turn every 15, 10 or 7 days. The game caters well for email players, by providing an all email world, in which turns can be sent in every 3.5 days.

As a player, you control your party, which starts with six characters and can have up to fifteen. Your party can travel around the worlds, fighting a huge variety of monsters and meeting other players. As you meet other parties, you may decide to fight them, leave them alone, or talk to them - it's up to you.

Quest is an open-ended game. As your party battles, its strength can increase, you may find potent magical weapons, until eventually, your party may become a real force to be reckoned with in the world! Player interaction plays an important part in Quest, with groups of like-minded people joining together to make alliances, which can own a Headquarters and sell items to other players.

... who knows better what the players want than another player? ...

What's new

So - now that I've described roughly what Quest is all about, I can start throwing a few of my opinions in. Since the arrival of Quest GME, whole new worlds have been created. The difference this time, is basically that they are a lot less static than in the earlier games. Cities have their own histories and alignment. Also they have their own rulers/councils, who will have different views and opinions. This leads to city interaction. Cities can be at war with each other, be allies, or just not get on too well.

This in my opinion makes the worlds so much better, as in the old Quest most of the histories of the worlds themselves was actually created by the players, and was unofficial. The new histories have, in part, been created by the same players (who have probably played the game for several years). The input from these players in the creation of the world is undoubtedly for the best, as who knows better what the players want than another player?

Quest GME at a glance

A low-cost adventure game from KJC Games, previously computer moderated but now with an active human moderator. Startup is free, later turns £2.

This in turn brings me onto the next subject, that of the game master. The game master, Richard Brewster, was himself also a long-term player. This for the same reasons above grants him a more insightful view into the game. The game master in the new GME edition controls all the events of the world; the players may wish to involve themselves with these, or may on the other hand just wish to stay well clear. Events such as worldwide epidemics have already happened in the games, and already cities are preparing to wage war on each other.

... an interactive and ever-changing fantasy world ...

The new worlds also make co-operation and teamwork very important. The game still caters for solo players who may wish to play the game without involving themselves too much with alliances, or player interaction, by allowing them to offer themselves to the aid of cities, which regularly ask for help in the world newsletters. These lone parties may be considered roughly to be mercenaries, finding work where they are able, and just going about life as they wish. The main scope of the game now relies on alliances, though, with them being able to set their own aims and philosophies, and getting quests from their home city in which their Headquarters is based. While some may say the game is now too alliance based, I personally only see this as a step forward, involving players more directly into the game, and encouraging players to interact, and keep contact with each other.

What you'll find

Every month (or every two weeks in the email world) alliances will be offered Alliance Quests from their home city. Alliances may choose to involve themselves in these quests, or just not to do them: mostly it is a good idea to help in the quests, as when they are completed successfully, the alliance will usually gain a reward, whether gold or magical items, for example. The alliance will also gain an invisible factor, known as Status. The amount of Status an alliance has is known only by the GM, and represents the alliance's standing with its chosen aims and goals. For example, if your alliance had chosen to ally itself with the Fighters' Guild, as they complete quests for them, they gain status with this guild, and as they gain more status, will be able to ask for more help from the guild.

... Constant improvements are developed and brought into the game ...

When you reach the highest levels of rank and status, your alliance may be very high in the guild indeed, and could maybe one day come to control it! This is an interesting aim, in my book, and is a good goal to try for. On the subject of aims, an alliance may set up to three aims. If it sets more, it will gain status much more slowly in each guild respectively, as the alliance power base is spread out more. I'd probably better stop going into too much Quest jargon here, as I only have so much space, but if you

want to find out more, the best thing to do is to check out the Quest website at

<http://www.kjcgames.com/questgme.htm>

Recommended

If the thought of directing a small party of elite adventurers around an interactive and ever-changing fantasy world, fighting your way through monsters, dungeons and the politics of the world, to reach wealth, glory, or power appeals to you. Well, try playing Quest GME! The first three turns are free!

And to follow on, Franz Berthillier ...

At the beginning of the new millennium KJC offered their Quest players the opportunity to transfer their parties to newly created worlds. I'd been playing Quest for a couple of years and was very excited about the new worlds, for a multitude of reasons:

First, almost 20 different worlds were in the First and Second Age versions of Quest. Many of them had thinned out the player base, leaving them just with few really active parties. As there are now just four worlds (with different turnarounds) it guarantees that the continents are pretty much inhabited, which is a very good thing. Furthermore, the maps are no longer computer generated, to do away with funny and unlikely combinations in the landscape.

Secondly the game, as always, is dynamic. Constant improvements are developed and brought into the game. The last year showed the introduction of more powerful and unique monsters, a better spell casting system, new characters, alignment locks, plunder slots, hands free turns and much more.

For an email player, like myself, the hands free turns are superb, as you cannot just change equipment, get rid of unnecessary stuff and handle your spell-casters' components, but also change your party's setup. Even more important, you no longer have to wait for your next turn if something important is happening, like personal messages or a fight, to get your results back. And all that is free of any charge!

... No single person could have created this game ...

Of course, the major improvement was the introduction of the moderation. Finally, Quest became the game which I had always hoped for. To be an active part of any alliance in the new worlds is a major fun factor - it always was. However, with the new special quests you get the feeling of doing something important and that's what you actually do.

Shifting the balance between good and evil, peace and war. Gaining influence in major organizations like guilds, temples or even cities. Deciding the outcome of wars, dealing with the minions of gods, handling or setting up intrigues or fighting ancient beasts for the greater glory of your alliance. All of this is possible and part of the game now. And of course your party gets rewarded for this as well as yourself.

Always wanted to cast that spell, that wasn't implemented in the game before? Use various and mighty powers. Always wanted to wield that enchanted longsword, given to your fighter by his god? Just make him very happy. Always wanted to gain more riches, to get yourself decent equipment or skill? Just work for your alliance and you will be rewarded with that as well.

Plenty to do

As an alliance head I am one of the people who are, of course, particularly happy. It is much easier now to convince your fellow members to get things done and to look for new members. And it is incredible fun to organize your alliance movements. While you still have the fun of playing your group or groups, you'll take on more responsibility now. Dealing with powerful organizations and other alliances can be quite dangerous,



or rewarding. Keeping your alliance together, making your members happy and solving complex puzzles with them is more fun than ever.

The aspect of player interaction, which was always one of my favourite ones in Quest, as it puts you exactly in between tabletop role-playing with your friends and pure computer role-playing where you look to build up your stats, has become more and more important. And the internet, emails, mailing lists and so on have made all this easier as well.

Now that I have been playing Quest:GME for ten months, I have to say that my expectations haven't failed me. One of the biggest advantages Quest has always had, is the time factor. Principally, the more time you invest in Quest, the greater are your rewards and the more friends you will find.

However, as a lot of us don't have the spare time we want to have, you can invest any amount of time you want. Pick a game world where you can send in two turns a month, or two turns a week. Play a single party or more. See Quest as a pure computer-moderated game and build up your party's stats or interact with other players, as part of an alliance. Or even take some responsibility with an alliance. It is all your choice, depending on your resources.

Achievement

Overall, I would describe Quest:GME as a great mix that creates its own category of fantasy roleplaying. The constant improvements, the feedback and ideas of the players and the dedication by the staff produced a kind of natural selection over a long amount of time. By now, Quest is all that and even more than I have written above.

But the awesome thing is: it will get even better.

Kings of Karadon

A Beginner's Guide

DUNCAN CHISHOLM gives some advice for players new to this complex game ...

SO, YOU'VE read the reviews, heard about the vast scope of the game and decide to join in - what can you expect? Before you go any further you should probably think about getting your letterbox enlarged. The start-up material is copious to say the least, especially if you join in one of the two existing games (at time of writing there are plans for a new game, though no firm details yet).

Let's take my experience of joining game two ('*The Ancients Return*') as an example. I'd been quite happily playing in game one ('*The Great Winter*'), but felt that I had the time for another game. First stop was to talk with the GM. We discussed various possible nations, before settling on the realm of Reichmar. This is an important step in choosing a nation in an existing game. Each game has a different plot line and I have found that it's useful to have a general chat with the GM to make sure that the nation you end up with suits your style of play. I found Hunky Monkey to be highly flexible and very willing to accommodate my ideas. In game one I play an island nation with a strong emphasis on fleets and a rather strange culture I have slowly been developing. For the new game I wanted something different, so I opted for the inland, war-like realm of Reichmar. The people there are a sort of Hun-like tribe renowned for their shock cavalry mounted on giant bears!

... the first thing to do is probably get in contact with one or two other players ...

Having decided on a position, I sat back and awaited the arrival of the turn materials: which thumped through my letterbox two days later. In addition to the well-presented, forty page rulebook, there was a massive pile of paper consisting of the following: thirty five pages of turn (including maps), a ten page newsletter, a two page beginner's guide to the game, a four page scenario booklet, an order sheet and a heap of information sheets detailing the knowledge acquired by my nation in terms of technology, unusual characters I can recruit, unique military units and so forth. Don't be put off by this - it's all well laid out and easy to absorb, though it's fair to say that if you want a game that you can glance at for ten minutes before writing some quick orders, you should probably stop reading this article now!

So, you have your turn, you've read through the material: now what? To be honest the first thing to do is probably get in contact with one or two other players. The GM will let you know which nations are near you, or otherwise linked with your realm and will probably also give pointers as to which players are friendly veterans happy to give impartial advice. This is a good system and one that could be recommended for a number of other games as well.

Bear in mind that any advice you might be given about Karadon (and that includes this article) can only be based on one particular player's

experiences. You will find that the more you delve into the game, the more things you will discover and the broader your scope for playing the game will become. I intend to touch on a few key points of the game, but remember that this is only a brief outline of the possibilities involved in what is a gaming experience to savour.

... Essentially each turn you can attempt anything you want to try ...

The economy

In many ways this is the most complex part of the game. At first sight there will appear to be a mass of figures, but all you really need to do for the first couple of turns is make sure you don't spend more than you have in your treasury. Once you've got to grip with the basics, you can begin to explore the mysteries of average wealth, taxation, trading, population growth and even establishing your own currency.

You are going to have to contact a number of other nations in order to conduct trade vital to your economy and the well-being of your people. It may be that you don't have a lot of agricultural land, in which case you will have to trade metals and industrial goods for basic foodstuffs. If you're lucky, though, you will start with an agricultural nation: on balance I think these are easier to play.

If you can't get all the goods you need from other players, don't despair! Each game has a general market which you can use to buy and sell goods - though you'll often get better prices from other players or even from Non-Player Nations (of which, more later). Initially, don't panic if you can't supply everything your people seem to be clamouring for. Concentrate on food, leather and timber. Shortages of everything else, though undesirable in the long run, won't have any immediate drastic effects so long as your people are well fed and have roofs over their heads.

Of course, you will be able to influence the way your economy grows by use of various orders. Remember to take careful stock of the terrain and climate in your area of the world and see what goods seem to be in short supply: maybe you can fill a lucrative gap in the market! Be careful though, improving your economic base doesn't come cheap. Yes, you can always raise extra taxes, but that in turn causes a loss of popularity, which can reduce the efficiency of your hard-working labourers. It's a game of swings and roundabouts which has as many theories about how it works as, well, economics in the real world. If anyone stumbles across the perfect economic model, please let me know: oh and I'd get in touch with Gordon Brown as well while you're about it!

- * *Don't spend more than you can afford! If you do, there will be an automatic emergency tax which has a graduated effect on your popularity according to how much extra tax needs to be raised. I've seen nations totally destroyed simply because the player thought he could use the emergency tax system to his advantage.*
- * *Try to set up long-term trade deals if possible. This cuts down on the frantic trading which tends to take place every turn and ensures you will get the goods you need.*
- * *Contact the non-player nations and offer to trade with them. I've actually found them to be more reliable than players!*

Kings of Karadon at a glance

In-depth, open-ended, fantasy empire building game from Hunky Monkey Games. Start-up is normally £5 (see ad in this issue), further turns cost £5.00. Reduction in turn fee for early orders!

Military matters

It is often said that the military system in Kings of Karadon lets the game down somewhat. I'm not sure whether I'd agree. The GM freely admits that the combat rules have been kept deliberately simple, partly to prevent combat becoming a huge number-crunching exercise and partly as there is so much else to do in Karadon, you really have much better things to do than spend too much time on complex combat calculations. This isn't a wargame and makes no pretensions to be one. Sure, military matters play an important part in the game, but they do not dominate at the expense of economics, politics and the more esoteric ways of roleplaying in the game.

You'll probably start the game with a few types of troop at your disposal. The basic unit is the Warband, but most races have access to at least one other type: e.g. Elves make good archers, Dwarves are skilled axemen whilst obviously all Centaur units are cavalry-based. Recruitment will require timber, leather and probably some metals as well. Don't go overboard with your recruitment to begin with. Not only does it have a less than salutary effect on your economy and popularity, but your neighbours are likely to view an ever-growing army with understandable suspicion. Never assume that someone, somewhere doesn't have the ability to find out what you're up to!

One way of improving your military capability without investing in a large recruitment drive, is to equip your existing troops with better armour and weapons. You should probably set up a standing order to train your troops every turn too, though as ever watch out that this isn't getting too expensive! Better leaders too will help, as will grouping individual units into armies under the command of decent generals (named characters).

Certain military units are also a useful way of moving population around the place, using the Settle order. Pioneers are the basic unit best suited for this purpose, but there are others which are large and more skilled at setting up settlements.

- * *Don't move pioneers into a new territory, even a previously unpopulated region, and settle them in the same turn (unless you already owned that area). If you do this you will be deemed to have granted these lucky people autonomy, which they will gratefully accept, leaving you no option but to send troops in to regain the lost land.*
- * *Spy out an area before invading! This will help you avoid stumbling into either potentially friendly territory, or biting off more than you can chew.*
- * *Train your troops a bit before flinging them into battle. Losses in combat are expressed by a reduction in training grade. If an unit of troops falls below training grade 1 it will be deemed to have been utterly routed and the unit will disband. Furthermore, some terrain causes attrition as you pass through, again losses taken in this way lead to reduced training levels.*

Characters

There are seven standard classes of character which everyone can name. You will need some of each and, in all probability you will start with a decent handful. The important thing to remember is that you can, in normal circumstances, only name one character each turn, so it is important to give careful consideration as to what skills this character should have.

Warriors are important for leading armies, and they're quite good at fighting the sort of things you'll find whilst engaged in quests or exploring the wilderness. Diplomats are useful to improve your popularity and may also be used to persuade territory to join your realm (be warned, this can be very expensive!) Merchants help your economy, whilst scouts are fairly self explanatory. Priests should not be neglected, though you should give careful thought as to which religions you want your nation to follow. Any more than about three widely worshipped deities and you start running into difficulty with jealous gods who think you're trying to hedge your bets!

This leaves sages. These come in two kinds (initially at least) namely technology and arcane. Sages tend to run up your expenses fairly quickly

but they are really quite invaluable to the development of your nation. All sages can issue the Research order, which generates a random advance of a type relevant to the sage undertaking the research. Technology sages will tend towards the practical things, whilst arcane sages will root through ancient scrolls and make advances in more esoteric matters such as writing, beekeeping and commerce. Arcane sages also have a habit of finding new characters which you can employ. These are usually of a type you cannot otherwise name, such as shipwrights, engineers, shamans and countless others. I believe there are over fifty known character types, though it wouldn't surprise me if there were more awaiting discovery.

- * *If you don't have many characters with your set-up, ask the GM if you can have some extra ones. Assuming you have joined an existing game, the GM will certainly let you have a few more characters if you're a bit short.*
- * *Name a character every turn, come what may! Even if you can't think of a use for it at the time, you can always find things for it to do. You can even hire out excess characters to other nations!*
- * *Always issue either an Explore or Seek order for a character (this can be done as a standing order). You may as well give yourself as much chance as possible to find random encounters or stumble upon something which could lead to a quest. After all, you can always decide not to pursue something that doesn't appeal to you.*

Other stuff

Believe it or not, the matters touched on above are only really the basics of the game. You'll probably find, as I did, that a great deal of your time will be spent thinking about all the other stuff which is going on in the game world. When a turn arrives, read through the accompanying newsletter carefully. Each game has a variety of different plotlines running at any one time, over and above anything which may be the result of player actions. These are not just passing storms which you can do little but weather, indeed if you don't do something about them the problems will begin to mount and disaster can strike.

But what can you do? Well, the best part of the game, for me, are the hand-moderated special actions and other such things. Essentially each turn you can attempt anything you want to try, using any of the resources of your nation. Be bold! Think big when you can, though there will be times when you have to use the special action to deal with some internal matter. You usually get about a paragraph from the GM in response.

Then there's the matter of Religious Conclaves, Guilds, Secret Societies and (in some games) the High Council - an international body politic a bit like the United Nations (and equally useless at actually achieving anything!). In all cases you can make free-form speeches and there are times when the GM will allow you a related free-form action to boot. Hours can go by as you plan an insulting speech against your enemies ...

Quest

It's a short word, but a single quest can take up a page or more of your turn and lead to glory, treasure, magical items or world-shaking events. Most quests are now free-form, which means you can try anything you like, though be careful as the GM is not afraid to kill off your characters if you take a wrong step!

Many quests will allow you to involve other nations if you wish. This is generally desirable as other players may have characters that can help with the task at hand. It also adds to the enjoyment. In the unlikely event of you being unable to think of a special action, ask around: you'll probably find you can do something for another player (but get something out of them in return!). Think your special actions through carefully. Don't be afraid to go into detail, the GM tends to like this better than an ill-thought out or sketchy idea.

Kings of Karadon: three words which belie the vast detail awaiting your exploration of this game. In the next issue, I'll be releasing excerpts from the secret diary of Duke Klothkan of Reichmar.

DungeonWorld: Frontier

Adventures in an Untamed Land

ANDY LONDON explores the Jungles of Bereny ...

The Setting

'Frontier is a strange jungle land far to the south-east of Bereny, populated by fearsome native tribes, savage jungle creatures, hideous new monsters and dinosaurs! Although a few intrepid explorers have travelled it to before, these have been a very few, very brief trips. It is mostly unexplored... and extremely dangerous! There are many reasons to travel to Frontier. Some go to find lost treasures so that they can return, rich, to Bereny. Others go for adventure and exploration. Many choose to move to a place where there are no laws and no rulers to tell them how to live. Such a life comes with a price! No laws means no protection. What is yours is yours only until somebody stronger than you takes it away! Only the hard survive in Frontier!'

Getting To Frontier

'To reach Frontier, travellers must first cross over 1000 miles of terrible wasteland, with temperatures ranging from freezing (when they first leave) to blistering heat. Monsters, very little food and a long and terrible journey make this impossible for most. Only a very few brave adventurers, seeking to carve out a life in the 'New World', ever make it. Those who join the game are assumed be some of the hardy few who have successfully completed the journey and have arrived at the only major settlement, a village called Bordertown.'

... too much for their father, dying of a broken purse ...

My Plans

WHEN I FIRST decided to start a group of characters in the module, as is often my wont, I sat down and thought about who they would be. Why embark on a journey fraught with danger to some unknown destiny that could only be worse than the home that has been left? I decide to play a group of six characters, brothers and sisters, whose family has been left destitute and only have a few gold to scrape together to take with them on their trek. The Kard family was born.

Three sons and three daughters of a merchant family, their father's unscrupulous dealings brought down the wrath of the state and the seizure of the family's goods and lands. It was too much for their father, dying of a broken purse.

The head of the Family was Peregorn, chosen because when the first turnsheet arrived, he had maximum human strength and an excellent willpower. He would take the lead, with scimitar in hand. The rest would be armed with bows, ready to explore a strange new world.

The Diary

Excerpt from the Diary of Peregorn Kard, eldest son of the Kard family.

'We have arrived in this gods forsaken hell-hole; after months of travelling we have arrived. In this New World shall we look for the means to gain wealth and lands for our family, a family laid low by the blinkered

views of the King of Bereny and his spineless cronies? This land is ripe for the picking.

Its inhabitants range from uncivilized natives to midnight elves. These dark skinned folk so hated and feared in Bereny, appear to have tempered themselves in the heat and life-sapping humidity of the Frontier. Treated as regular citizens, they live alongside the natives, although they do, to their credit, maintain a respectable distance more out of sanitation than admiration.

... 'There is profit to be made here!' ...

There are also a race called the Aslani. Humanoid cats they are, with an air of arrogant presumption about them that makes you want to grab one by the scruff of the neck and rub its nose in its own mess. They regale us visitors with tales of their once-great civilisation, their tales of honour and bravery, and then go off to skulk in their mud huts.

There is profit to be made here! Talk of mines in the jungle, and another native tribe that trades in human bondage. I feel we should seek these out. These sub-humans have a worth in their ability to work, and therefore it shall be our first quest to seek out the Ngawi tribe, and learn from them.'

Settling in?

So I had my plan, the Kard family are a less than moral lot who are out to exploit the Frontier for profit in any way they can. Not averse to slavery, insulting the locals and putting numerous cats amongst a flock of pigeons, I set about getting them equipped with whatever their funds could scrape together, and then setting off in search of the Ngawi tribe. It was then that the true nature of the Frontier began to become all too apparent to me and the other newcomers ...

'The heat! By the Rift, the heat and the humidity can fell a man easier than the mightiest warrior. We Berenians were ill-equipped enough, even with gifts from the natives at our arrival, and purchases from the few merchants that came down here with us, but we never expected this.

... a spider the size of a small horse came skittering through the tree tops ...

We were not a days travel from Bordertown when we had to return! We had but two skins of water between us six, when we walked through the morning and the day. It was gone by mid-afternoon and our throats were like kindling wood. We turned back and got more skins to fill from the wells in the town.

Other groups have suffered worse, men collapsing and thirst putting them near death. It appears, though, that the natives know where to find water in the most unlikely places. I saw one climb a tree and fill his skin with water collected in a hollow. Another cut a vine and let the liquid drip into his mouth like a stream. They laughed at some attempts by fellow Berenians to attempt the same, and even stopped one man when he tried to drink from a small pool; evidently death can come from drinking the wrong water, and a painful death at that.'

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.

So, the six Kard family members (all human warriors by the way, nothing subtle about them at all) recruited the aid of a local lad. I added another character to the group, a native scout by the name of Jai. Natives have the ability to forage in the jungle, gutting monkeys to make skins, squeezing fruits for their juice, and it wasn't long before our 'native lad' had provided juice and water for all, and continued to do so as the group explored. First hurdle overcome!

'We had heard noises all day. The sounds in this place are incredible: by day, strange birds launch through the canopy of green above, and the sounds of the animals all about give the jungle the feeling that it is itself alive! Even though we stick to the small paths and trails about, the jungle even at its thinnest requiring much work to pass, there is life all about.'

As we walk, Jai points to this creature and that, and tells us its name. But we don't bother remembering the hundreds of things we see, they end up being called 'the Green bird with the red bill' or 'the dog thing that sounds like a wet fart'.

Then there are the elephants! Huge creatures of a, fortunately, a gentle disposition. Were we better armed and armoured they would be a fine trophy as they sport tusks of ivory that fetch a worthy price back in the Bordertown market. As it is, they amble past caring little for us.

Not to say that all creatures are so inclined. Yesterday, a spider the size of a small horse came skittering through the tree tops with a speed and grace that belied its bulk. There was no doubt that it was headed for us, and as I stood at the vanguard ready to meet its charge, the family stood behind and fired arrows into its red and hairy body until its corpse fell not five foot short of the path. We are told there are more of these creatures out there, some large spiders hunt in packs, their venom enough to kill and elephant.'

... a cry that was the release of all that I hate about this land ...

As the groups spread their reach throughout the area, reports came in of all manner of creatures. Many varieties of large spiders, venomous in the extreme, some big cats, apes, unfriendly natives, snakes and other creatures of unknown nature and form. As groups began to get smaller in number as various avenues of exploration opened up, reports of more and more casualties began to seep in, and it was not long before bow-fire was not enough defence for the Kards.

'It was dark, and the usual incessant noise that comes with the retreat of the sun had begun some hours ago. As we rested, there was a sudden rush from above and two forms dropped into the midst of the group. Two scarlettos (the red breed of spiders previously, now so named) fell upon us and began to rear up and bite at any too close. I charged one with my scimitar and inflicted a mighty wound, but the others had but their bows and in the confines of the path with the darkness and the chaos, they were of little initial use.'

As I hacked at the body of the monster, I heard the scream of pain from Ossicant, our youngest brother. As we looked we could see the creature's fangs had pierced his chainmail shirt and sunk deep into his shoulder. As the spider's venom sac emptied I could see the wound ooze purple liquid as the poison was pumped into his body. His scream was one of such intense pain that there could not have been a creature within a days march that could not have heard it.

I slashed at the creature and even Jai stabbed at its body with his spear. My sisters Kellagora and Melagrimm were both wounded by the spiders before we killed them, but fortune was with us in that they were not subject to the poison, that Jai told us was known as Arianæ, "The Burning Death".'

The poison was terrible. The character developed a raging thirst, suffered incredible penalties and was losing health at a dramatic rate. With little other option, he was given one of the few teleport scrolls that

we had afforded to purchase and teleported back to the town. He crawled to the nearest well and did little more than stick his head in and drink. He kept his health up by eating almost constantly, and by chance had finished his training in the Athlete skill that gave an increase in health. With some gifts of the healing Mana bread from some friendly priests in the town, he sweated it out.

As a number of characters were suffering from various ailments, poisons and diseases by this time, there was a new race on, to find cures. Early on, the antidote for Arianæ poison was discovered; crushed Blackshell Beetle. (Brave the adventurer who first experimented with that!) I located an ally who had some antidote, and believe it or not on the turn that the cure was handed over, the poison ran its course and Ossicant recovered (but kept hold of the beetle).

While he had been recuperating however, there had been other developments.

... things can always get worse ...

'Sad news. Jessalyn, our dear sister, was scouting ahead. The natives had given her a Calendar Stone when she arrived, and it had allowed her to focus her vision and see more than the rest of us in this jungle. She was no more than a stone's throw away, a distance we thought safe enough.'

We heard the elephant some distance away, and by now we had thought nothing of them. But this was different. When it saw her, the elephant went mad; it was as if this mountain of flesh and awesome power could not tolerate the presence of a human. It broke through the jungle as if it were tall grass to a charging stallion, and broke the line of trees before we had even realised what its intent was. As I ran forward, my heart hammering against my ribs, arrows flew over my shoulder to stick like pins into its flank.

As I closed, I noted a broken spear was already stuck into its leg, the area around the wound blue and surrounded by weeping pustules. The rogue elephant, a massive male, was driven by pain, and hatred of the cause of the pain, humans. The festering wound may well have caused a poison to affect its mind, but reasons for its actions were no saviour for Jessalyn. I cried aloud as the massive foot of the beast rose up, and time slowed as it came down once, twice, three times.

The crimson rage came over me, and it was as if the madness of the rogue had spread to my own mind. I cared not the bulk of the creature, nor the noise of the arrows that passed my head to stick in the side of the grey bulk, that was a world away. My arm would rise and fall, rise and fall against the hide of this beast of destruction.

Jessalyn died. The rogue elephant died, and something within me died too. Whatever I felt, a part of me had viewed some aspects of this land with an inspiration. It was deadly and beautiful, it could cause despair but also a lust for life that Bereny could not raise in my soul. When the creature fell to the ground, the ground shook; I too shook, with a well of emotion I never knew possible. I raised my head to the skies and let out a cry that was the release of all that I hate about this land.

It had killed a member of my family, it had made me turn from a civilised man to a beast of anger and mindless violence, and it had made me become everything that I despised about this place.

I stopped, I looked down, and saw the bloodied mess that was once a young woman, but I did not cry. This land had killed whatever emotion I had left, and now I knew my destiny, I would defeat this land, bring it to its knees, and civilise it!'

Jessalyn was squished, and her stuff passed out amongst the group. Our first casualty, and with Ossicant in a bad way, things were looking bad at an early stage for the Kard family, but as usual in games like this, things can always get worse.

Next: Despite recruiting an unusual new member to the group, the Kard family discover that there are even worse things out there, Bordertown is subject to a surprise attack, and what lurks in the river?

SPORTS NEWS

A news-packed column for CHRIS DICKSON's farewell ...

SINCE TAKING on the role of Sports Editor four and a half years ago, back in issue 67, I have mentioned 89 different sports PBM games in *Spokesmen Speak* columns. Football games outnumber all the rest by 49 to 40.

Therefore it's with not a little amazement that there are two new football management games this time, with genuinely new and interesting differences to the hordes which have preceded them. Most football management games see players in control of squads of game footballers with numerical ratings in one or more skill categories. Players then select teams of eleven players; these teams' skills are compared with each other along with the computed effects of tactical decisions in order to produce a match result. However, two games which use alternative match resolution systems have recently come to light.

The **EFIFA League** is based on the popular '*FIFA 2001*' computer game. A major advantage of play-by-mail games over computer games is that you're not playing on your own, relying on your imperfect reflexes against those of a computer, so this may seem a strange choice. However, it seems that there is some way to use the game to compute results of hypothetical matches without taking into account the button-pressing abilities and timing of the players controlling the teams; the EFIFA League uses this to decide who should win the matches in the play-by-mail game.

As a manager, your input is limited to team selection along with selection of attacking style, defensive style and an 'attacking intensity' value. There is no transfer market in the game; transfers in real life determine the squad of players from which you can select. The twelve teams are pitted against one another in league competition, but a separate cup competition determines a second set of champions.

This game has been running for four complete seasons now, featuring twelve managers from six countries, which is a reasonable track record. However, I can't help feeling that in trying to create a game with the advantages of both a postal game and a computer game, you also tend get the disadvantages (inflexibility, physical disconnection and limited control) of both media. An interesting idea, though, especially if you're familiar with the computer game. See

<http://www.geocities.com/emailfifa/>

and pick your way through the incessantly capitalised text for more information.

Premier Management Football isn't the first attempt to provide a crossover between traditional football management games and role-playing games. There have been others in the past where you have interacted with characters in the game in order to take the greatest possible advantage in the situations which have arisen. However, Premier Management Football extends this by determining the results of the matches in the game largely on how well the players role-play.

This sort of match resolution system isn't unprecedented; thousands (literally, apparently) of online wrestling games operate using the same principle. However, this is the first time I've seen it used for football. It applies fairly naturally to wrestling as there is a presupposition that the match results are concocted in order to create ongoing storylines which are entertaining for the fans. However, football is traditionally reckoned to be a game in which teams of players try to outwit and outplay each other, the result coming as a consequence of skill and luck, so trying to convert managers' characterisation skills and activity into goals feels very alien.

Not that that's necessarily a bad thing! The game is barely a month and a half old as I type, but the site is attractively designed and the text on it well-written. The rules suggest possible scenarios in which the players might be able to demonstrate the

acumen of their manager and the good points of their club. For instance, the televised post-match press conference is now an established part of the trappings of actual football and it features heavily in Premier Management Football. Furthermore, going into considerable detail about your tactical plans and demonstrating ways in which you really know the practicalities of winning at football will eventually be rewarded with favourable results.

The description alone will be enough to give you a good clue whether you would enjoy the game or not. The rules are insistent on both high quantity and high quality of role-playing, so I suspect you'd need to put a lot of time, effort and thought in to get maximum entertainment from participation. Unfortunately, the rules are also insistent that details of the game's mailing lists are only to be given out to active players, so it's not possible to tell from the outside whether the game lives up to its considerable promise or whether the players are whiny and selfish enough to drag it down. However, the presentation gives an extremely professional impression and a waiting list is in formation already, both of which are



good signs. This one looks like it's worth paying attention to; the web site at

<http://pmf.netfirms.com/>
has all the details.

I mentioned wrestling games above; while the countless e-federations proceed as before, a variation on the format has come into prominence once more recently. It seems that a game of gladiatorial combat called **Mystic Arena** has an existence which predates the commercial popularisation of the Internet, being previously primarily found on computer bulletin boards. Recent years have seen it return into the public eye, developing and learning from the lessons of online wrestling.

Mystic Arena technically refers to a ruleset by which many games are run. Each game chronicles the tales of fights taking place between gladiators at one arena; the usual setting alludes to both the colosseums of the ancient world and modern day pro wrestling.

Gladiators are rated for strength, endurance, willpower, weapon skill, fighting style and the like. They also earn gold to buy armour and weapons (both legal and contraband, in the same way that certain, ahem, stimulants can be found on the streets if you know where to look).

While these statistics alone are sufficient to determine the results of the matches, the rulesets emphasise that far less entertainment will be gained from the raw results thrown up by the computations than by the interactions of the players' gladiators and the co-operative storylines that people produce. Indeed, it's explicitly stated that players should aim to prioritise having an interesting character with a lousy record in the actual battles ahead of having a character with many wins to his credit but little influence on the game world.

I would recommend the 'Mystic Arena' games as a possible entrance to today's world of crossover sport/roleplaying games. They don't need particular technical knowledge of any one sport, merely a strong constitution and a bloodthirsty imagination.

The original game can be found at

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

(technically this is the New America League, set in sleazy San Maritius) and is recommended for its enthusiastic GM, keen to communicate the ethos of the game through a well-developed history despite some rather erratic spelling. Alternatives include the Great Wild Northern League at

<http://home.graffiti.net/gwnl/>

(a newer game, with more direct allusions to the conventions and terminology of present-day pro wrestling) and the Medieval League at

http://www.geocities.com/rebecca_ml/

which has a distinct, lightly fantastic feel.

This will be my last issue as Sports Editor; while I've thoroughly enjoyed my time in charge, the time has come for me to hand over the baton to someone else. At the start of the column, I referred to the number of games I had mentioned in these columns over the years. It may be worthwhile to stop, look back and identify the trends over this time.

The single biggest change has been the impact of the Internet. Online games now far outnumber offline ones, simply because e-mail is such a convenient medium for communication and because the web is an ideal way to store reference data in depth that would be impractical as a printed record. A fairly direct consequence of this has been the proliferation of automatic computer-moderation programs and the decentralisation of organisational responsibility from a few big games to many smaller ones. It's far simpler than it ever has been before to use someone else's programs and systems to run a game of your own for players all around the world.

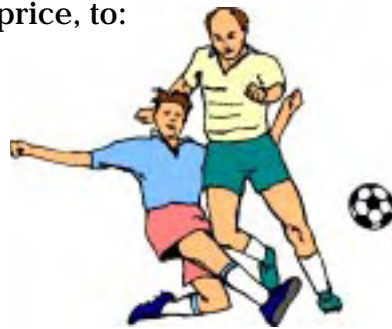
There's no reason to see why this pattern will change in the future. Maybe the media involved will get richer, with the moderator programs expanding to generate the long-threatened sound, animation and graphics, enhancing the atmosphere. However, the most important thing will always be an enthusiastic, committed GM and a good crowd of players. After all, to quote Alan Parr, the inventor of **United** and so a founding father of postal sport, 'it's people, not games, who make up the hobby'.

Soccer PBM Game

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The Flagship Ratings 2001

Sifted and sorted by our Ratings Editor, TIM LOMAS ...



WELCOME to the annual ratings extravaganza. Details of how the stats work for the annual results are at the end, if anyone is insatiably curious. Please note that your full name and address are required for email and web votes as well as postal votes.

You'll have noticed a severe lack of me in the issues since last November. The reason is quite simple, you didn't send enough votes for me to print anything significant. The votes cast this year are heavily down on last year and at one point it looked as if I might not be able to even publish annual ratings. Fortunately a rash of votes appeared in the last few weeks, which means that I could publish these. The moral is simple: if you

want to see ratings, send in your votes. I can't publish what I don't get.

Special note for GMs: remember if your game gets no votes for the year, it doesn't appear in the Ratings, no matter how many it got last year. You'll notice that the Ratings categories don't bear a great resemblance to the Galactic View categories this year. I decided to stick with the old categories as it maintains continuity from previous years.

Now the preaching is over, let's get on. Last year's winners are indicated by an asterisk. All votes are out of 10.

FANTASY WARGAMES

Middle Earth takes the trophy for a second year, with a slightly increased rating. A few vanish, but not a huge difference. The lower games are dropping slightly with the higher games rising.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
* Middle Earth	Harlequin Games	8.29	8.39	7.24	7.70	6.90	43
Overlord	State of Mind	8.01	8.82	7.00	7.18	7.92	23
Kings of Karadon	Hunky Monkey	7.96	7.84	8.24	7.63	7.78	23
Serim Ral	Harlequin Games	7.57	8.00	7.00	5.86	8.14	4
Adventurer Kings	Pagoda Games	7.53	8.28	6.86	5.83	7.51	11
War of the Dark God	Titan PBM	7.33	8.67	7.00	8.00	9.00	3
Legends	Harlequin Games	7.08	8.56	8.45	7.50	6.88	31
Lizards	Ninth Legion	5.82	6.20	5.11	4.42	5.69	15
Hand of the Demon	Spellbinder Games	4.00	4.78	3.89	3.89	5.00	5

REAL WORLD WARGAMES

A second win for Agema's **La Gloire du Roi**, with Squad Leader grabbing second place as a new entry. Napoleonic Battles suffers a fairly drastic drop. An ex-winner drops out while Crisis! and Company Commander swap over.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
* La Gloire du Roi	Agema Publications	8.93	8.30	9.30	8.42	7.33	12
Squad Leader	Richard Miles	8.14	7.00	6.14	2.57	8.86	4
Crisis!	TimePatterns	7.83	7.66	6.22	6.92	6.42	16
Company Commander	Jason Oates	7.82	7.09	7.92	5.91	7.3	9
Napoleonic Battles	Agema Publications	6.68	6.65	5.23	1.93	5.25	11
Ancient Empires	Jason Oates	6.29	6.57	6.71	5.00	6.57	3
Warlord	KJC Games	5.63	5.25	4.13	4.13	5.13	6

WORLD GAMES, POWER GAMES ETC

Last year's winner drops out of the Ratings and **Absolute Fantasy** takes the prize (although with a slightly reduced rating). Some slight rises, but mostly down a little this year.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
Absolute Fantasy	Silver Dreamer	7.98	7.65	7.56	4.70	7.01	12
Tribes of Crane	Zen Games	7.93	9.63	8.95	7.77	8.13	10
Assyria's End	Agema Publications	7.21	8.00	7.21	5.93	5.79	4
Crack of Doom II	Harlequin Games	7.14	8.22	6.97	5.44	6.78	6
Primvs inter Pares	Interesting Times	6.42	6.63	6.10	4.22	6.64	15
Empires of Corinium	Viking Games	5.00	3.14	5.86	3.86	6.57	3
Realms of Israa	Viking Games	3.38	2.21	4.88	2.42	7.71	5

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Last year's winner vanishes (Inferno was a fixed length game and finished even before the Ratings it won) and **The Chevian Chronicles** returns to the top position it held two years ago. Mostly new entries in this category this year so no real comparisons are relevant. Absolute Dominion isn't running at present and Sage En Garde! has closed.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
Chevian Chronicles	State of Mind	8.22	8.90	7.64	7.43	8.33	18
Absolute Dominion	Titan PBM	7.67	7.67	7.00	3.67	7.67	3
Terran III	Richard Burd	7.67	7.94	8.44	4.72	10.00	4
EG The Sun King	Michael Cruickshank	6.86	7.57	7.71	7.50	7.64	5
EG Sage	Steve Arnott	5.57	7.79	5.43	3.79	7.50	3

SCIENCE FICTION

SE III retains its title, with StarFleet Warlord following as last year. The gap is narrowing, with SE III dropping slightly. BSE II enters the charts as a couple drop out.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
* Star Empires III	Crusader Games	8.34	9.26	8.43	7.26	8.60	7
StarFleet Warlord	Pagoda Games	8.26	8.45	7.26	5.77	7.85	21
BSE III	KJC Games	5.91	8.03	8.43	6.86	6.34	9

SPORTS - FOOTBALL

Football games get their own ratings again, as the number of games here rose. An astonishing result with **Away the Lads** scoring a perfect 10. I can't imagine that it'll retain that next year.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
Away the Lads	Dracs Games	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	3
Kick-About	Spellbinder Games	6.85	5.00	6.52	5.23	7.32	8
Extra Time	KJC Games	4.50	5.07	2.50	1.36	5.29	5

SPORTS - RACING

And of course racing gets its own category again. **Fallen at the First** retains the title it won last year in Sport and the previous year in Racing.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
* Fallen at the First	Dracs Games	9.07	9.03	9.40	8.48	9.18	7
A Day at the Races	Dracs Games	8.10	9.25	8.45	6.48	8.80	7
Horses for Courses	Spellbinder Games	7.13	4.50	4.50	4.50	6.50	3

ADVENTURE GAMES

We have a new category. As we now have four games which fit into the Adventure Games category, it emerges from the depths of Miscellaneous (or wherever they were placed before).

DungeonWorld returns from Miscellaneous to win the category, giving Madhouse a second win in three years.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
DungeonWorld	Madhouse	7.55	8.13	6.84	6.79	7.46	71
Phantasmech	Crasiworld	6.17	6.6	6.07	3.03	7.90	8
Quest	KJC Games	5.34	5.85	4.64	4.94	5.21	28
Monster Island	KJC Games	4.81	5.57	5.29	4.17	5.31	8

MISCELLANEOUS

And finally we complete the list with Miscellaneous, the games which I didn't fit into other categories. As a couple have been recategorised and moved out this is a small category this year, comprising a crime game, a wargame which I didn't think fitted either wargame category (commuters on some LT lines may disagree) and **Mortis Maximus**, the winner, which may fit into a category if Rollerball ever comes to pass.

Game	GM	Anticipation	GM	Depth	Interaction	Value	Votes
Mortis Maximus	Madhouse	7.42	5.50	4.37	2.06	6.68	12
LTWars	Spellbinder Games	6.00	6.44	6.22	3.78	6.44	4
It's A Crime!	KJC Games	6.00	5.70	4.15	5.20	5.55	11

A point about voting patterns

A game with larger numbers of votes and computer-moderated games, both tend to produce lower votes. The most enthusiastic players always vote first and later ones (especially when the GM encourages everyone to vote by sending out papers) include those slightly less enthusiastic. In the case of comp mods and hand mods, you simply can't get the same relationship with a computer! The exception is the occasional game where the disgruntled players get their votes in first: this can result in a very low result until the rest of the votes appear.

In other words, the more votes for a game the lower their average would tend to get. A winner who also has a lot of votes is exceptional. Very low or high results with a small number of votes are usually anomalies which iron out as the sample size increases.

How the stats work

To get into the stats for the year, a game must fulfil two conditions: it must have at least one vote this year and it must have a total of at least 3 votes. Anything failing either test is filtered out. I then calculate the

ratings for the games by taking the average for each year and weighting them. Votes for this year are weighted at 100%, 2000 at 75%, 1999 at 50% and 1998 at 25%. Anything older than this is filtered out. The logic here is that the more recent votes should be more relevant, while the opinions of players who may not have voted this year (for many reasons) should still be considered.

This gives me the final rating. I sort them by Anticipation, add these words of wisdom and it's over for the year.

A note for GMs

Winners from previous years may no longer use the term 'Flagship Award Winner' in their adverts (or elsewhere) without qualifying it with the year. If you do use the 'Award Winner' term in your adverts, please ensure that you quote the correct category where relevant.

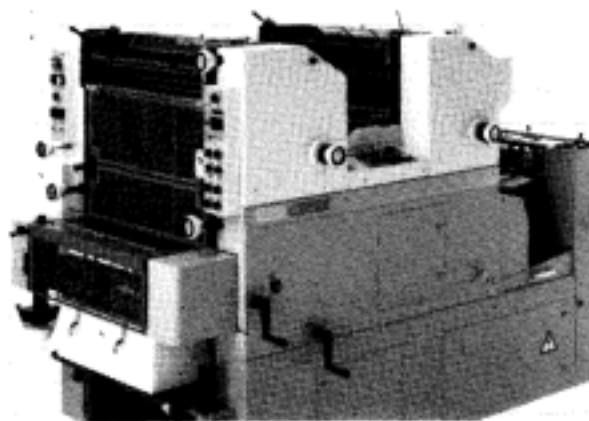
How to vote

You can send your ratings by normal mail, email or Fax.

By mail, send them to Tim Lomas, 211a Amesbury Avenue, London SW2 3BJ. If you have something else to send at the same time (subscriptions, rumours, etc) then send them to the main *Flagship* address and Carol will pass the ratings along to me. Please don't send the other stuff to me, it means that it gets delayed getting to Carol.

By email, send them to flagshipratings@antsnest.demon.co.uk making sure that the ratings are in the correct order (Anticipation, GM, Quality, Depth, Interaction, Value for Money) and that you remember the game! Your name and postal address is now required for all email and web-based votes to bring them into line with paper voting. You should get an automatic response to this next time I collect my email. By Fax to 0870 0568059, this is a national rate call. Alternatively, vote on the main Flagship website!

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Lords of the Earth

Friction and Grit: Building a World Engine

THOMAS HARLAN talks us through the design process ...

Lords of the Earth is a play-by-email historical campaign game, set on our own world. Players represent kingdoms, monastic orders, merchant houses, secret societies and religious authorities. Individual campaigns of Lords are set in a variety of time periods - from the dawn of civilization to the eighteenth century. Save in tournament style campaigns, there are no victory conditions and no pre-set end-points. The Lords community is currently thriving, with 30-odd campaigns in a wide variety of historical situations and hundreds of players on three continents.

Background

Over twenty years ago, James Dunnigan developed a historical simulation of medieval Europe called *Empires of the Middle Ages*. At the time, Empires was quite innovative - it covered a long span of time, from Charlemagne to the fall of Constantinople; you used cards, your king had ratings, your empire rose and fell due to both your own efforts, enemy action and random events. The year Empires hit the shelves, our local game group spent a lot of time playing the Grand Campaign game. Though we loved the game dearly, I was dissatisfied with its geographic and stylistic limits. I hoped for supplements to appear, adding the rest of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and a battle system with some color... Sadly, none of those things happened. When youthful patience failed, I added my own maps, letting Moslem and Indian players enter the game. The result was better, but still not what I really wanted.

At the same time, I had developed a futuristic PBM game called *Core* which suffered from too much detail and a complete lack of computer support. Dissatisfied with the resulting 'feel' of the game, I began work on a simpler historical game system inspired by Empires and aimed at capturing the historical ebb and flow shown in Colin McEvedy's Penguin Historical Atlases. The resulting game, with six letter-sized maps (covering only Eurasia) and a six page rulebook, was the first iteration of Lords of the Earth PBM game system. There were all of ten players for the first turn of what would become 'Campaign One'. The first year of the game was 1000 AD.

Eighteen years have now passed and the game has expanded dramatically. The map comprises the entire world, from Iceland to Antarctica. The player's rulebook is 135 pages long, the GM's Handbook even longer. There are supplements covering the Renaissance and the Early Industrial eras. Other moderators have adapted the base system for High Fantasy and Science-Fiction campaigns.

Game Mechanics

Springing from a desire for a simple game system which would be easy to moderate and fun to play, LOTE provides three mechanisms for the player's nation to affect the game world: the efforts of Leaders, spending resources on Builds and Projects and the use of Operations Points.

A Leader is a specific, named individual under the control of the

player. Leaders may be kings, heirs, lieutenants, mercenary captains, religious leaders and so on. Only a Leader may move armies or fleets to conduct Actions. There is a long list of Actions and sometimes it seems more are added with each new turn. Leaders age and die, are killed in battle or by assassination and are replaced by sons or daughters, or generated wholly new from the national population. Each Leader's 'public' abilities are quantified into Combat, Diplomacy and Charisma. In addition, a ruler has a hidden Administration ability and non-rulers have a hidden Loyalty rating.

The acquisition and expenditure of resources is also simplified into 'gold' and 'National Force Points', which is manpower. Both are derived from controlled provinces and cities and from a variety of special terrain features (the Silk Route, various kinds of Trade Centers and so on). The relationship of each province or city to the owning nation is expressed in a tiered set of Control Statuses, which range from a 'Claim', which is no more than a nominal expression of diplomatic interest, up to a 'Homeland', which is directly and completely controlled by the nation. Each higher level of control also implies a greater administrative burden for the nation.

Revenue is also derived from trade, which flows through port cities and across peaceful land borders. The trade subsystem of the game can be implemented by the moderator in either a simple way, where the volume of trade on a given route is controlled by the program, or by a more complex model where the players are allowed to adjust merchant shipping levels on each route to optimize the tax revenues produced. As sea trade must be carried in merchant shipping, each nation must decide if it will invest in a strong merchant marine, or if it will leave the opportunity and risk for other nations.

Aside from building different kinds of units - Infantry, Cavalry, Engineers, Warships and so on - to man armies, the player may use his or her resources to build new Cities, establish Colonies, invest in Public Works and engage in a wide variety of special purpose Projects such as building Roads, Pyramids, Millennium Domes and so on. All of these things carry with them different levels of support costs as well.

Religious and Espionage activities are handled through the use of Operations points, which represent the capacity for action, and Bonuses, which represent skill in execution. Both sets of ratings are constrained by technological level and religious strength, respectively, and may be improved by money, effort and time.

One critical section of the game system which is specifically placed outside of player control is the advancement of national technology levels. A 'whole nation' formula is employed by the supporting programs to calculate the rate of advance through a series of broad tech bands: Dawn of Civilization, Classical era, Dark Ages, Middle Ages, Renaissance, and so on, which are subdivided into Tech Levels. Though the player can improve his nation in a variety of ways (better training for his troops, better doctrine, more wealth, more population, higher education, etc.), there is no direct mechanism for the acquisition of Tech Points. Indeed, the improvement of some sectors of the national profile will retard technological advancement in favor of - for example - social stability.

This approach, where certain parts of the game mechanism are invisible, causes both great apprehension on the part of the players and - we believe - greater realism in play at very minimal cost of effort. The 'exposure' of the underlying system would only promote rules-lawyering and physics-tinkering by the players, at the expense of a strong role-playing component. We felt paying too much attention to the 'man behind the screen' kills the vitality of the game.

Lords of the Earth at a glance

A PBEM run by a variety of moderators. Current British moderators are Steve Brunt and Leslie Dodd (see Galactic View for details); turn charges are usually about £3. Reviewed in issue 84.

For more information, see:

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

The site includes listings of the many games running world-wide.

‘Friction’

The success of the LOTE system over the long term (at the time of writing, seven hundred and forty-eight game years have elapsed in Campaign One), derives from what I term ‘friction’. By this I mean that the intrinsic system itself does not give the player results without cost. For example, to conquer a neighboring province requires raising an army (costing gold and manpower), engaging in a campaign (which may fail with casualties), then garrisoning the region (resulting in the loss of mobile troops and incurring a constant drain of gold due to troop support requirements). In addition, holding ground (provinces and cities) increases the ‘Imperial Size’ of the nation, which in turn requires more government resources (what we term Infrastructure and Bureaucratic Level) to control.

This kind of recursive, self-limiting mechanism is used throughout the LOTE system. The design-team goal is to allow the player a wide range of options and flexibility for his nation. We are not trying to make the game self-defeating, but instead we reward the careful, canny player who works within the limitation of his nation. Personally, I feel the game plays better when a player’s nation is not quite as strong as he or she would like. Playing the over-powering behemoth isn’t as interesting (to me anyway...).

Two more sources of friction in the game are the use of Random Events (a long and varied list of good, bad and colorful events) which can be entirely customized by the moderator, including rates of occurrence and locality; and Dynastic Failure / Rebellious General / Civil War mechanisms.

Nothing causes more fear in a LOTE player than realizing his king has grown old and there is no heir of suitable age to succeed him. The accumulation of power (armies, lands, wealth) into the hands of over-mighty lieutenants runs a close second - both circumstances may well lead to civil war and chaos within a nation. These kinds of friction also limit (but do not prevent) the growth of enormous empires and serve as a mechanism to ensure the continued health of a campaign.

Many PBM campaigns have a tendency to drift into a kind of stasis, where the dynamism of small, scrappy nations has been lost in the establishment of powerful empires and regional alliances. When this point of equalization occurs, the tension in the game tends to evaporate, leading to a kind of stasis. Periods of balance are necessary, however, to advance the base wealth- and technology-level of the game. Prolonged stasis, however, tends to lead to boredom on the part of the players and the Game Master.

Though some LOTE campaigns have fallen prey to this same situation, most of the games have avoided this fate due to the constant creation of new player positions from the ashes of old. The rise and fall of dynasties, empires and even religions gives the game a tremendously important narrative flow.

The Story

This element of ‘story’ is the most important part of a successful LOTE campaign and the most difficult to quantify in a set of rules or programming mechanisms. We handle this issue by having a human moderator in the mix and the most successful campaigns are ones in which the moderator makes a conscious effort to make each newsfax (the turn newsletter) read both as an immediate story of war, treachery and conflict as well as part of a larger history.

Tracking genealogies and the lives of specific ‘characters’ (national or mercenary leaders, or members of their immediate families) across the decades helps provide a narrative framework which enriches the game. The dispossessed sons or daughters of overthrown kings may return to seek vengeance upon those who have stolen their patrimony. Exiled princes may become mercenary captains, or even seize an empty throne in a foreign land.

Cults, secret societies and religious orders thrive across national lines, each pursuing its own goals - which rarely equate to the simple search for power, wealth and glory in empire. These hidden progenitors of events also keep the kingdoms and empires on their toes with plots and counter-plots, which makes for a lively game.

Even as the situation in each game changes from turn to turn, the supporting framework - rulebooks, maps, computer support programs - is also in constant evolution. We’ve found there is always some new rules question to be answered, some new process to be automated. Luckily, the fervor and dedication of both the player community and the Game Masters is up to the task.

World-building

Starting a Lords campaign requires some work on the part of the Game Master. While the game system itself is fairly period-agnostic, the campaign needs a starting point and situation. This means Game Masters must either use a pre-built campaign pack - startups for the Dark Ages (400 AD), Millennium (1000 AD), the Crusades (1100 AD) and the Renaissance (1400AD) are available - or devise their own. Rolling your own campaign offers a huge range of opportunities, including building a fantasy setting or the dawn of civilization. You also get the joy of doing a lot of data entry and revising the maps to suit...

A campaign can also be started without a historical framework. This is called a ‘free’ start, where each player begins with a region and a city, as well as an initial allotment of gold and manpower. From there on out - it’s up to the players! Interestingly, after 15-20 turns, a ‘free’ start campaign is usually indistinguishable from a historical startup. The pressures of geography, ecology and human desires tend to produce similar results from disparate beginnings.

Of course, it’s just like Athena, sprung from the forehead of Zeus!

The development and improvement of the Lords system over the last twenty years has been driven by two goals - to produce a game which feels historical while avoiding becoming a historical simulation - and to keep abreast of the undying ingenuity of the players. Both pressures have brought us a long way from that six-page rulebook and hand-drawn maps.

Actually implementing the game has always been a labor-intensive process. New computerized tools are constantly being developed either by the designer, by the game masters or by the players. Despite this, processing a turn usually requires an investment of about an hour per player. Somehow, even as the processing system becomes more streamlined, the game masters spend just as much time per turn. In many cases, the extra time is devoted to the newsletter, resulting in something approaching a living novel, which makes the players very, very happy. (‘More about me? Joy!’)

Currently, the support application is a DOS text-mode program (remember DOS?). Three years ago, it seemed terribly archaic to not have a Windows interface. Since then, we’ve found the reliable old programs run equally well on Windows, Linux and Macintosh without recoding. An unexpected benefit! They’re also pretty fast.

Bulk output is generally written in plaintext to a file, allowing the Game Masters to email or print or reformat the results as they please. Work is underway on a next-generation of tools, including a Java-based client which will generate a set of orders in XML for even more automated processing. A dynamic map system, based on the Scalable Vector Graphics format, is in process.

The future is pretty bright for the Lords of the Earth community. We see decades more gaming ahead!

Thomas Harlan at a glance

By trade, Thomas Harlan is a professional author who writes alternate histories, science-fiction and fantasy novels. He also develops play-by-mail wargames in his spare time.

Thomas’ novels (*Shadow of Ararat*, *Gate of Fire*, *Storm of Heaven*) are available from fine booksellers everywhere. Visitors to www.throneworld.com have the opportunity to purchase autographed, personalized copies of Thomas’ books via the paypal system. *Shadow of Ararat* was reviewed by Martin Helsdon in Flagship 88. Thomas is currently writing the first book, *Wasteland of Flint*, in the Time of the Sixth Sun series.

CRISIS!

The Game of Global Conquest!

Diplomacy is at its lowest ebb for years. Trade has all but ceased and politicians are at their wits end. Power-mad generals have taken control of the major states and things are looking grim.

The massed machines of war line every street, troops bristle with the latest death-dealing weapons and the madmen are planning their strategies. The stage is set for the greatest upheaval mankind has ever witnessed.

You have been placed in charge of your country's future. You have the power to carve out a new empire for your homeland, your warheads have been primed, your troops and battlecraft are at the ready. Your decisions will be vital to your own survival! As supreme commander,

you have the authority to create powerful new Troop and Paratroop divisions to attack and conquer your enemies. They come equipped with all the latest laser-guided ultra-lethal weapons your money can buy and are trained to win at any cost.

Your silos are crammed with the latest nuclear missiles, capable of devastating vast areas of enemy territory, destroying their industries and mutilating their populations. Counter espionage, military satellites, Terrorists and the mighty Supergun also feature in this wargame of epic proportions! But remember ...

There is no escaping the radiation!



TimePatterns PBM Games

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C r i s i s is easy to play, boasts a simple order system and loads of action from the very start. Diplomacy is highly recommended.

The game is won when a single player conquers all or an alliance of 3 players sees off all the opposition. fortnightly deadlines, £2.50 per turn, including SAE for UK players.

Start-up and rulebook is **FREE!**

The Displacement Engine

Chapter 4: Queen Victoria, Harrods and the Russian space programme...

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

THE VICTORIANS who entered Sir Rawley Withycombe's Displacement Engine discover its inventor visiting 1950. One of their number, the policeman Benjamin Garland, is slain by mysterious grey creatures who mistake him for Sir Rawley. Silas and Patience both choose to stay temporarily in 1950, to discover the wonders of the future. Sir Rawley plans to take his evidence of time travel back with the others to their departure point, 1850, but the greys return and fire upon them. The Engine is damaged. It displaces not to 1850 but to 1650, where its arrival frightens off a crowd gathered to watch a hanging. The woman who's the intended victim recognises Sir Rawley ...

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.*

THE WOMAN on the gallows throws back her head and laughs, 'Rawley Withycombe - at last! What kept you? You were playing a dangerous game, sir! Now come here and untie my hands, if you please!'

Sir Rawley has fallen to his knees with a cry of amazement, but scrambles up and rushes to obey the woman's demand. As he reaches her, his companions realise that she isn't as tall as they'd first perceived; quite a short woman, in fact. Hangmen and clergymen are clearly of a smaller breed in the 17th century. Away from the shadow of the gallows, her braided hair is a light brown. She is more self-confident and imposing than Victorians expect their females to be.

'Is this person really a witch, perhaps?' asks Horatio Percy, nervously, 'How else can she know who Sir Rawley is?'

'Something's gone wrong,' says Tennant, 'Can we be trespassing into some actions that Sir Rawley has not yet committed? Are we tripping over different time lines?' He is anxious, but as the most practical man in the group he knows that there's work to be done. The crowd may return. Turning away, he rolls up his sleeves and sets to work on repairing the Engine without more ado.

The others mutter in consternation. 'Different time lines?' gasps Adolphus, 'Oh lor', what has Uncle Rawley been up to now?'

'This isn't caused by what he's been up to now, but what he'll be up to shortly!' explains Joseph Rouncewell, confusingly. 'One of the possible problems of time travel, my friends, is that of meeting oneself en route. But who, then,' his voice trembles with a dawning realisation, 'is this lady?'

They stare aghast at the woman as she approaches. Yes, there's something appallingly familiar about her.

Adolphus murmurs, 'It can't be! Not the queen!' but that's who she all too clearly is: their Sovereign Lady, Queen Victoria. They kneel, alarmed.

'Do you mean that Sir Rawley will bring the queen back in time after we've returned to 1850?' hisses Horatio Percy, 'Impossible! How can he have left our gracious sovereign here in this barbaric age, and in danger of hanging? Why is she on her own? Have we committed treason? Dear Lord, assist us poor innocents!' He wishes that he had had the courage to stay in 1950, with Patience Withycombe.

Mention of a sovereign recalls Patience Withycombe and Silas Trimmer, who change several sovereigns at a jewellers into the coinage of 1950 and climb aboard an omnibus heading into town. How wonderfully silent these vehicles of the future are, they agree, a greatly improved form of the steam engine.

Patience plans to head for University College, London, to discover whether female undergraduates are admitted, as they certainly should be by now. Respectable women seem able to walk alone in safety in this well-conducted age. That's good: no problem in exploring on her own. She is spell-bound by her first sight of a department store, and wonders whether to conduct some research there, first. So many ready-made clothes, and in such a variety of attractive colours, too ... but no, first she must resolutely count female undergraduates!

Silas decides to head for the British Museum's library, to investigate the latest works in mathematics. Alas, once he has parted from Patience he gets himself hopelessly lost, and he leaves our story. How? Because he wanders into a building which he mistakes for his town house, but which is really the Russian embassy. Silas Trimmer's contribution to the Russian space flight programme of the 1960s is one of the untold mysteries of modern history.

Although Sir Rawley had been startled by Victoria's cry of recognition, he guesses that of course she's arrived here as a result of a journey in his Engine. Oh dear, he must have offered this to her. So somewhere in 1650, there must a future manifestation of himself! And a repaired version of this somewhat battered Engine, with the red velvet chairs he's ordered for his royal party! But why is the queen here on her own, and in such danger? Hmm, better not ask. Better escort her safely away ...

Sir Rawley takes Victoria to the Engine and to his companions kneeling beside it. She nods to Rouncewell, Tennant and Adolphus, 'Pray do not kneel, gentlemen. After all, in this past age I am but a subject of my own ancestor Charles the second ...' the men recognise this as a royal jest and take her humility with a pinch of salt ... 'Not that he's been crowned yet, of course. It's so exciting! But,' turning to Sir Rawley, she continues brightly, 'I was expecting the Prince, my husband, to be with you. Where is Albert?'

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

Just one question, this time, for next issue's final instalment: Can you suggest possible ways to extricate Sir Rawley and his followers from this dodgy situation? No, the GM hasn't got a conclusion planned: it's up to you!

GM note: Thanks for your ideas. Sorry I couldn't use 'em all - I went with what seemed the weirdest of them! Replies to Flagship by December 15th, please.

Starting next issue, as the Displacement Engine concludes, will be a new game for you to join. This time we've opted for some High Fantasy - swords and sorcery included free of charge! If you have any preferences for the sort of characters who will take part, please let us know. The game will be set in the world of Midhir, though no knowledge of the background is needed. Just buckle on your swords, blow the dust off your spellbooks and prepare to search for **The Lost Gold of Stronmark ...**



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News from America

And it's Vinegar Time, from the one and only BOB McLAIN ...

IN THE LAST issue of *Flagship*, Duncan Chisholm wrote that I should take a vinegar tablet. When I read his suggestion, I thought: who is Duncan Chisholm? I'm sure a lot of other people have asked the same question. But Duncan Chisholm thinks I should take a vinegar tablet because I've lost my edge. My vitriol has dried into a cakey mass. I have been *Flagship*-ized. Well, Duncan, I'm going to make you famous. I'm dedicating my column to you. Now you have something to live for, something to tell your grandchildren. Bob McLain is aware of Duncan Chisholm.

In an earlier issue of *Flagship*, I wrote that *Midnight Games* had become a 'division of *Ray Technologies*', and then in the next issue, Carol Mulholland published a correction by Sam ('Dusty') Roades, whose company runs *Midnight's Legends* in the UK, and who wanted to make it clear that *Ray Technologies* is a licensee of *Midnight Games*. Like you care, right? Well, I quoted 'a division of *Ray Technologies*' directly from *Midnight Games*' Web site. And you know what: it's still there. I'm right. If Sam wants to make a correction, let him go to the source, and if Carol wants to disrespect her legendary columnist, Bob McLain, let her ask Duncan Chisholm to take over for me.

If *Midnight Games* says that it is a 'division of *Ray Technologies*', then by God, that's what it is!

Do you know Don Lund or John Muir? Of course not. Lund tried to establish a player's association years ago, and John Muir played in a few Schubel games. I bought articles from John Muir to publish in *Gaming Universal* back when he was still studying to be a librarian. I don't have a problem with these guys, but I've seen both of them referred to as 'legends' on various Web sites. I have never heard myself referred to as a legend, except a few times when I've swallowed too much Viagra and my partner has swallowed too much booze. (And the next morning, the legend always becomes a loser, but we'll let Duncan Chisholm write about that.) How are Don Lund and John Muir legends? I'm a legend! And with every column I write, I become more of one (more of a legend, not a loser, who said that?!?).

Duncan Chisholm! Does my cakey mass of vitriol appeal to you now? I'm doing this for you.

Rick Loomis! How many times has *Starweb* won the Origins award for Best PBM Game? Yes, *Starweb* is a wonderful game, certainly one of the best ever designed, and yes, I would trust my money with your company, *Flying Buffalo*, and yes, you have great talent as a game designer, but can't you do more? Isn't it time to help the next little Buffalo? Look around, find a good PBM game, and tell your friends at GAMA that you'd like to nominate someone else's game. Yes? No? I remember the early days, when you accepted money from other PBM moderators for classified ads in *Flying Buffalo Quarterly* and then wrote above those ads that 'most people just beginning to moderate games will bite off more than they can chew and end up abandoning their games'. Was that a public service announcement? I did the same thing when I intimidated PBM companies to put their Web sites on tightbeam.com and not on the competing sites run by Greg Oberfield and Colin Forbes. Rick, you and I, we're more alike than you'd ever care to admit. Now come over here and give me a hug...

Jason Paul McCartan! I want my *Gaming Dispatch*. Where is it? Where is this 'monthly print and online magazine for all turn-based games, including play-by-mail...'? According to the Web site, the first issue 'will be published in October', and it'll only cost me \$5.99, a really dumb amount to charge for a magazine. Oh, I get it: make people think they're getting it for under \$6.00! If I send you six dollars in an envelope, will you send me back a penny taped to a postcard? Nah, forget it, just put the penny in the little change cup by your computer in case the next subscriber needs it. And riddle me this, Cart-Man: if *Gaming Dispatch* is monthly,

why does it come out in '6 bi-monthly slabs of 64 pages', eh? My brain hurts.

Duncan Paul Chisholm! You owe Jason Paul McCartan an apology. Whee! Who's next? Rich Buda! In 1983, you sent me a signed contract to buy *Nuts & Bolts of Gaming*, the world's first play-by-mail magazine, and with that contract, you included a list of your subscribers' names and zip codes (but not their addresses). I ripped up your contract. And I looked up the matching city for each of the zip codes on your list, then sent each of your subscribers a *Gaming Universal* brochure, using 'General Delivery' for a street address. I included a note explaining that I got the name because *Nuts & Bolts* was for sale. I got lots of new subscribers. You never forgave me. You even hung up on me when I called to make a lower counter-offer for your magazine. I'm a sharp businessman who has lost thousands of dollars in the play-by-mail industry. Don't mess with me.

Larry Deyell! In last issue's Feedback, you complain that you don't like my column because you've never heard of any of the people (living or dead), firms, and events that I mention. Please give me your postal address so I can send you a sign to paste on your forehead: 'Who that, huh?'. It will save you the trouble of saying those words every waking hour of your life. Next time I mention Rick Loomis or *Starweb* or *Middle-Earth PBM* or *Pagoda Games* or *Origins* or *DungeonWorld* or *Quest* or even Jerry Lee Lewis (all mentioned in my last column) you can just point to your forehead. Thank you, Bob! De nada, Larry Deyell. Who that, huh?

Duncan Chisholm! You're right. My column was voted the most popular bit in *Flagship* when I flung the words onto my computer screen in gouts of venom. My column was voted near the bottom of the pack when I spent dreary paragraphs telling everyone how much I liked **Right of Kings**. I need the vinegar tablets. Without them, I'm not even someone you like: I'm just another miserable little writer piling up words about miserable little games. I'm bored with play-by-mail games because I haven't stabbed anyone in years. There's no cure for bobulism.

Ah, the old days, when they sang nasty songs about me (to the tune of *Modern Major General*) at gaming conventions. Ah, the old days, when I told myself there were a couple billion Red Chinese I hadn't pissed off yet.

It's time I got to work. Those Red Chinese are procreating faster than ever, and I'm very much behind.

Thank you, Duncan Chisholm. Who that, huh?

mclain@voicenet.com

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Flagship needs YOU!



GM Interviews!

Nominate your favourite GM for a *Flagship* interview.

Why not suggest some questions?

We're waiting to hear from you!

THE MIGHTY PEN



Prisoners in PBM?

Over the past few issues of Flagship, there have been a couple of misleading letters about those who are currently serving time in prison, and I feel it is only right to defend myself and fellow inmates who choose to partake in what I believe is a fabulous hobby.

I can fully understand the paranoia about playing with people like myself who are, after all, convicted criminals, but I would hope that this comes from a lack of understanding rather than prejudice. I would guess that those few gamers who are worried are mainly concerned about what the prisoner will do when he or she is released, ie if you slaughter his army in a game, will he then seek retribution in the real world once he has been released?

I can think of a number of reasons why this is highly unlikely and I could sit here waffling on hoping to convince you that I'm not a threat to you. I won't, though, because at the end of the day the same narrow-minded and prejudiced people who refuse to play in games with me will come up with equally one-sided arguments. Let's face it, how can I defend myself against arguments that include 'What If's'?

We all have our own opinions on this matter, but I think one opinion that we can all agree on is that anyone who would even think of committing a violent act of retribution over a game of any sport is clearly suffering from a severe form of psychosis.

Ask yourself these questions. Do you honestly believe all prisoners are violent scum? Do you really believe that those who are capable of this kind of behaviour are only in prison? If I'm a Muslim, does this mean I'm automatically a terrorist or that I condone acts of terrorism? Surely recent events have shown the dangers of prejudice.

As human beings, we are all capable of mistakes in life. And although I am maintaining my innocence, I was convicted of a crime and so as punishment I am serving a period of time in prison. Believe me when I say that conditions in prison are not at all pleasant. The prison I'm in is 340 miles away from my home, and so I don't see my loved ones very often.

Please, I beg you, don't take my only hobby away from me.

Gareth Wealleans

[This topic seems to have generated some heated opinions, so we've made it an issue for Feedback.]

Are Game Prices Too Low?

I've been following the discussion about game prices with interest. I suppose we all agree that there's a natural conflict between players who want to pay as little as possible and moderators who'd like to earn a living wage.

But I do think that free startups are a mistake. I wouldn't join a game where the other players are going to drop in large numbers once their free time is up. Besides, it must surely be a lot of work for GMs to register the new players, even in a computer-moderated game?

Better to send out a sample turn for free, so players can see what they're in for, but take a charge before they actually get to play.

Jim Beeston

Formerly known as the Post Office...

Has anyone noted in Flagship that the Post Office is becoming Consignia?

Yes, well, we all have to earn a crust, and I have no doubt that there's some over-paid boffin sat at a desk somewhere, still counting the money he got for that particular brainwave, looking forward to being paid an awful lot more money to change the name of some other national institution.

Just think 'Parliament' could soon be known, corporately, as, um, 'Decisions R Us', or 'Misguidenia'...

Larry Deyell

[Beats me why the Post Office needed to change its name, but then I've never recovered from the loss of Opal Fruits. Consignia strikes me as a real stinker ...]

We want more new games!

A discussion on a PBM-related mailing list has recently centred around the problems found by players eager to start a new game. Put simply, there doesn't seem to be much that is new out there! Where are the big autumnal launches that used to be a feature of Flagship news columns in the past? I would estimate that Harlequin, KJC and Madhouse are probably three biggest PBM companies in the country - but all three seem dedicated to improving and promoting existing games at the moment. This of course is a laudable exercise, but where is the commitment to developing new games?

Although it's good to know that existing games are being improved and given new life, let's face the fact that new games are the lifeblood of PBM. Eventually players drift away from long-running games, however excellent they might be. If there are no new games to re-invigorate the hobby, I find it hard to believe there will be much of a future for PBM.

Come on guys, invest in the future and get those new games out! I bet every GM in the country has at least one idea for an excellent new game!

Duncan Chisholm

Desperately seeking discussion

Is there a general PBM discussion forum on the net? I know there are chatteries for specific games, but would like to find somewhere that covers PBM games in general - does anywhere like that exist?

Tel Timpson

[I follow the rec.games forum myself, though discussion on this is rare and isn't especially good humoured. Any other suggestions?]

Let's get together?

PBM, it's a great hobby isn't it? I've been playing, on and off, for years and years and can honestly say that you'd be hard pushed to have so much fun for so little money doing anything else. Not only do you get nice coloured maps to look at, the high of victory (and the low of defeat) but PBM is a hell of a good way to socialise with people one might otherwise not meet.

But enough of such eulogising! If PBM is such a great hobby, why does nobody in the real world know what the hell it is? Boardgames - yes, Roleplaying - your average man in the pub has probably heard of Dungeons & Dragons at least, but PBM: not a clue mate! Games shops are stacked high with computer games, boardgames, RPG, figures and allsorts, but ask about PBM and you'll get a blank look.

Why? It surely wouldn't be exactly difficult to get some level of representation of PBM into games shops and at general gaming conventions. There are Wargames Conventions galore, yet do PBM GMs running similar games attend? I seem to remember a plan to get Flagship into games shops but not once did I actually see anything come of this!

Could not GMs and Flagship co-operate (a dirty word, I know) sufficiently to produce a 'Beginners Pack' or something similar which could be offered to games shops and taken along to conventions. If enough people pulled together, it wouldn't be difficult to at least put PBM a little more into the awareness of the general gaming public. After all, wouldn't that be good for GMs, Flagship and Players alike?

Mark Gordon

Your Feedback on Issue 93

LAST ISSUE scored a respectable 8.35.

Many of you enjoyed its first article, the En Garde! overview: 'nice to know about such a legendary game, and what all the fuss is about!' says **Larry Deyell**, and 'fascinating - who'd have thought there were so many versions out there!' says **Ben Williams**. The DungeonWorld diary impressed readers like **Tel Timpson**, 'I thought the game only did adventuring positions, so this was a real eye-opener.' Also popular was the Kings of Karadon article: **Ben Williams** likes 'the way the reviewer has staggered his reviews so as to give a more balanced picture of the game over a period of time'. **Nick Palmer** likes the **Legends** article, too: 'well-written and reminded me of why I want to play this one day.' **Bruce Edwards** thinks 'Zine Scene was fairly good, but there are quite a few more zines out there.' Don't worry, we'll cover more in time! In fact, we've covered loads more in this very issue! **Bruce Edwards** also thinks 'PAFL was good. I'm playing in a zine game at the moment which is a lot less complicated, but PAFL could suck me in.' **Nick Palmer** found the Clovenshield article an 'insight into a different kind of game'. Several of you are enjoying the Cheviat Chronicles diary: 'it's always fun to read,' says **Mike Jepson**.

Bruce Edwards found 'Nothing really boring. I did look really hard.' and most of you agree. **Wayne Yeadon** disliked 'Starfleet Warlord and Mercenary Action. The latter I have no interest in reading about in a PBM magazine.' **Nick Palmer** disliked 'PAFL: not interested in sport in general, and this sort of article seems a particularly boring way of describing a sports game. Week N: we play X, we miss a field goal, they score a punt, they win 17-11. Week N+1: we play Y, we score a field goal, they narrowly block a push, we win 11-10. Who cares?' Aw, I thought the series was fun to read because of its helter-skelter images. **Ben Williams** queries the Cheviat diary: 'It's all very interesting, but not being able to join the game has rather put the whole diary into a no-man's land. Surely you should be concentrating on games people can join?' Hmm, let's try a question on this ...

Question 4 picked up the Tailpiece discussion about GMs playing in their own games. No-one would absolutely avoid a game that its GM plays, which was option (a). No-one chose (c), that this seems a good way for GMs to spot any problems. 63.5% agree with (e), that if GMs play, they should say so, 15% with (b), that it's OK if GMs enter their own orders before they process other players', and 21.5% would expect GMs to run positions in open-ended games, option (d). Many of you agree with **Ben Williams**, that 'It depends on the game'. **Nick Palmer** argues that 'in a game with lots of tactical finesse like the old Starweb, I'd avoid a game with the GM in it as he'd always know how to exploit the quirks of the programme. In a game where I was confident he didn't have this sort of edge, it might be fun to take him on.' **Larry Deyell** has 'No worries about GMs playing in their own games, as long as they say so. Maybe I trust GMs too much?' **David Andrews** mentions 'something I have known to be perceived as a problem, was that a GM playing in one of his company's games has unrivalled access to the other GMs, who are often his friends as well. And it's hard for two people not to talk about something both are interested in, especially when they knock off after a hard day's work and go for a pint.' Gosh. Here's a useful suggestion from **Bruce Edwards**, 'Perhaps if GMs include a section in the rulebook as to how inactive positions play? The most annoying thing I've come across was in a game where trading was a part of the game: a long-standing trading partner dropped out and within a few turns, trade between our nations ceased.'

Question 5 asked about playtests. 17.5% will only join a game after the playtest: 'I don't have the patience to put up with playtest errors,' says **Paul Garston**. Many of you - 49.7% - will join a playtest to help advise on the game's system, though maybe not entirely as public benefactors: **Larry Deyell** says it's 'because you can moan and whinge, and be seen as being helpful!' 32.8% will join a playtest because it's a cheap way to get started in a game: 'Cost really matters to me, but I'll sometimes stay in a game once it starts costing money if I've got to know

it,' says **Mike Jepson**.

Question 6 asked whether you (a) only play commercial games, (b) only play free games, (c) play a mixture, (d) have strong opinions either way. 48% of you play a mixture: 'I play games. Whether people charge for them or not is irrelevant,' says **Ben Williams**. 'I'll play anything as long as I find the game of interest,' agrees **Wayne Yeadon**. 32% play only commercial games: 'I'm prepared to pay for a game that's pretty deep - it's only fair,' says **Paul Garston**. Not many of you have strong opinions on the subject, but **Nick Palmer** does: 'I've occasionally been burned in commercial games, but quite often in free games - in the latter, you are dependent on the GM's goodwill and on the game being more important than other things in his life, which in the long run it probably won't be. If it's his main income, there's a reasonable chance it will always have a high priority. I also feel that good GMs *deserve* an income for giving us fun, and the free GMs who come and go are essentially undercutting their chance of making a decent living.' **Mike Jepson** dreams of 'winning the lottery - so I can pay the nice PBM GMs to run their games for free.'

Feedback questions on #94

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

- 1 Please rate this issue from 1 (stale) to 10 (spiffing).
- 2 Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 Which bored you, and why?
- 4 We sometimes cover games which can't accept new players. Is this
 - (a) interesting if it's a good game,
 - (b) an acceptable way to hear about games I wouldn't normally play,
 - (c) irritating when I can't join it?
- 5 Drawing on a letter in Mighty Pen, would you
 - (a) have no objection to a prisoner as a fellow player,
 - (b) prefer not to play with a prisoner,
 - (c) expect to be told if a prisoner is playing in the game?
- 6 Another letter asks for more new games. Do you
 - (a) agree that the number of new games is too low,
 - (b) feel you've not yet worked through all the tempting games that already exist,
 - (c) prefer the idea of tried and tested games being revamped,
 - (d) have a brilliant idea for your own perfect game?

*[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the Flagship office, or by email to Flagship@flagship-pbm.co.uk. By **December 28th**, please.]*

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ZINE SCENE

Zine Trek: The Next Generation

JOHN HARRINGTON beams down to report ...

AFTER concentrating last issue on celebrating milestones reached by the hobby's old war-horses I want to feature a couple of newer zines this time but I can't allow the 250th issue of Jim Burgess's *The Abyssinian Prince* to pass without comment. TAP, as it is known, is practically keeping the US Diplomacy hobby alive single-handedly and also acts as a bridge to the online Diplomacy community. In these days of zines appearing every five or six weeks, Jim's adherence to a three-weekly frequency is remarkable: no one has been achieving this sort of rapidity since the seventies when zines were little more than two-page flyers. TAP is far more than that, featuring extremely competitive **Diplomacy** games with vigorous player involvement, plus other hobby favourites such as **Breaking Away**, **Snowball Fighting** and **Outpost**. The rich gaming experience is augmented by a lively letter column covering topics as diverse as politics, sport and music and gives the lie to the oft-repeated claim that Americans don't care about what goes on outside their own country.

Issue 250 was the first to appear following the terrorist attack of September 11th and so as celebratory issues go was a downbeat affair but nothing seems to keep this zine down for long. If you are based in Europe you may have qualms about subscribing to a US zine because of the hassle involved in sending foreign currency, but the Amateur Postal Gaming Hobby operates a very useful facility called the International Subscription Exchange (ISE) which enables UK residents to pay for American zines in sterling and American residents to pay for European zines in dollars. TAP's editor, Jim Burgess, is the US representative for the ISE and I am the UK rep (see below for our addresses), whilst agents for the Netherlands and Australia have recently been added too. Drop me a line if you ever need to pay for a game in US or Australian dollars, guilders or euros. Money laundering drug dealers need not apply.

I have just completed issue 22 of *Mission From God*, the annual directory of postal gaming magazines, and it is a tad depressing to see only four new zines started up in the last 12 months, and one of those *Armistice Day* is from the doyen of the UK Diplomacy hobby, veteran editor Stephen Agar, whilst another -psychopath (covered last issue) - was the revival of a zine from the early eighties. *psychopath's* editor, Mike Dean, has already abandoned the paper version of his zine and has gone 'web only', which leaves just two genuine whippersnappers, namely *Jack Duckworth's Alternate Universe* and *The Tangerine Terror*.

Jack Duckworth is primarily a game report for the fantasy football game run by its editor, Simon Ives. The zine is up to issue 14 whilst the game is in its eight season so the mutation from a game report into a fully fledged zine is relatively recent. Given that fantasy football leagues (with big cash prizes) are run by national newspapers such as *The Times* or *The Daily Telegraph*, you may be wondering why you should bother with a game run by an obscure zine from Gloucester. You've doubtless heard of the chant 'There's only one David Beckham' (the only clean Beckham chant I know)? Well, in this game, there is only one David Beckham, and only one Michael Owen and so on: multiple clubs may not own the same player. Thus there is a fight, via an auction system, to secure the best players, and transfers between clubs are not unknown. In short, the game offers more decision making and more player interaction than its newspaper counterparts, plus there is a campaign element as squads are retained from one season to the next.

The rest of the zine is fleshed out with some lightweight but enjoyable all-reader games, plus some laddish humour. Cost is £8 a season and the zine appears every two or three weeks.

The Tangerine Terror was once a sub-zine within the pages of Jack Duckworth's *Alternate Universe* but has since struck out on its own. It runs some unusual games and is available at the very reasonable price of nowt. Zip. Nothing. It's free, gratis and complementary to anybody who wants to receive it, although I suspect this policy is only sustainable whilst the subscriber base is relatively low.

Games on a sporting theme feature prominently in this zine too, with the **Spread Predicto** game challenging players to predict sporting events such as the number of red cards Roy Keane will acquire in a season, whilst **Football Strategy** (the old Avalon Hill game) mixes scissors, paper, stone with American football. The mind boggles at **Postal Tennis**. You can not be serious! The zine's editor, Howard Bishop, would also appear to be a bit of a closet wargamer as he is running **Battle of the Bulge** and looking to start a game of Columbia Games' **Quebec 1759**. It's like the eighties never happened! People running war games by post, good grief.

Short of paying people to subscribe to the zine it is difficult to know how much more accommodating Howard needs to be to lure in more subscribers. He needs to find a real crowd-pleaser of a game to form the centrepiece of the zine; if you know of one then suggest it to him for he looks to have the enthusiasm and efficiency to make a go of any game.

Not exactly a new zine but still a baby by modern zine standards, *Strangitude 26* from Paul Sands is a formulaic but dependable zine. Each issue features a quiz, some sporting comment, some Diplomacy articles plus of course reports on the games (**Diplomacy**, **Railway Rivals**, **Sopwith**, **Breaking Away**, **6 Nimmt** and the rarely seen **Speed Circuit**). There's nothing ground-breaking about the zine and its seven-weekly frequency is certainly relaxed but like Ol' Man River, it just keeps rolling along.

Next issue I intend to have a look at some zines that feature **Railway Rivals**. A group of us successfully ran a demo game of this at Flagship's PBM convention in 1999 and after Diplomacy it is the second most popular game in the zine-based hobby. In subsequent issues I shall look at other games that are the stalwarts of the zine scene. If there is any game in particular you'd like me to feature then contact me on flagship@fbgames.co.uk.

The Abyssinian Prince, Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA (burgess@world.std.com). Jim is the US representative of the International Subscription Exchange.

Mission From God, John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW (mfg@fbgames.co.uk). John is the UK representative of the International Subscription Exchange.

Armistice Day, Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drove, Brighton, BN1 6LA (stephen@armisticeday.com)

Jack Duckworth's Alternate Universe, Simon Ives, 42 Elmlea Road, Kings Stanley, Stonehouse, Glos., GL10 3HR (simonives@hotmail.com)

Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Road, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B72 1YL (strangitude@mcmail.com)

The Tangerine Terror, Howard Bishop, 43 Guinions Road, High Wycombe, HP13 7NT (laties@globalnet.co.uk)

Sample copies of the above zines and others can be obtained by sending 4 first class stamps to John Harrington (1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW).

Flagship Zine Listings

There's a whole world out there!

COLIN FORBES has been compiling a list of Zines and Zine games ...

I'VE BEEN rather busy over the last month, writing to a huge number of Zine editors. Why? I hear you ask. Well, I'm in the process of compiling a listing of amateur zines for inclusion in Galactic View. So far I've written to about forty zine editors, though I've only received replies from ten of them. All these zines are listed in Galactic View (on page 49). Of course, there are lots more out there and I'll be getting in touch with those I have not covered yet in the near future. In the meantime, I'd welcome news of any zine readers may be aware of. Perhaps you'd like to recommend one to other Flagship readers? The intention is to build as complete a listing as possible as part of Flagship's continuing commitment to all parts of the turn-based gaming hobby.

On a slightly sombre note, if anyone has any ideas why the majority of Zine editors contacted might have chosen not to reply (I suspect most *are* active), then please drop me a line! I must admit to being a little perplexed.

Zine Descriptions

We begin with **The Abyssinian Prince**, which is a gaming and chat zine with the focus on fun! The letter column features all manner of music, film and artistic discussion, as well as sports. The gaming features lots of 'press and there are a number of very active subzines as well. The zine is almost 20 years old and recently published its 250th issue. **off-the-shelf** comes as a nice booklet (aka digest in the US) and runs to a six weekly turnaround with 20 or 24 pages. a nice touch is the colour maps for the games and even the occasional colour cover. Features include letter column, map quiz and editorial ramblings. This one has been going for quite a while, the next issue being the 76th issue! **Flights of Fancy** is a straightforward, uncomplicated zine that aims to run as wide a variety of games as possible. **Strangitude** is an A4 zine (they often come as A5 booklets) which features mostly games with some articles and amateur short stories. In contrast with many zines, there is little in the way of chat.

Armistice Day is a highly regular, monthly production by Stephen Agar. Stephen also maintains the Diplomacy Zine archive in the UK - a vast collection of Zines, past and present. Armistice Day is primarily a Diplomacy Zine, though with some friendly chat and interesting articles. The most recent issue saw a topical article concerning the 1842 British retreat from Kabul. In contrast to Armistice Day, **Underneath the Mango Tree** is a generic postal gaming zine trying to cater to just about everyone except Diplomacy players! Mangozine often includes a decent-sized letter column (five or more pages), some general chat and gossip about the hobby, plenty of ideas and rules for possible new games to play or try by post, and topped off with lashings of game reports thrown in for good measure. As Alex Bardy, the editor says, 'Would Sir or Madam like to try something a little different today?'

To Win Just Once is published by Paul Evans, the veteran Zine gamer who is most noted for his involvement in Games Games Games magazine, Small Furry Creatures Press and En Garde! games in general. This is his current publication, which includes the long-running En Garde! game, Les Petites Betes Soyeuses. TWJO comes out about every five weeks and another fine presentation it is too - blue card cover and well produced throughout. Some other games are starting to appear, including Great White Hunter and Star Trader.

From a solidly paper zine, to **Psychopath** - which has an excellent website (www.psychozine.co.uk) but no longer caters for snail mail or

even PDF readers. Whether this is a sign of things to come for Zine publication in general remains to be seen. Editor Mike Dean is very enthusiastic and updates the website frequently. Take a look! **Variable Pig** on the other is another impressive production, mostly concerned with Railway Rivals style games.

S.O.B. is a modest effort devoted to multiplayer games of many sorts. Editor Chris generally provides color maps and a relaxed atmosphere. The brilliantly named **Boris the Spider** is a 20 page digest of games with not much talk. Finally, for now, there is **For Whom the Die Rolls**. This is an excellent production by Keith Thomasson (who also organises the annual Zine Poll). FWTDR mainly concentrates of the 18xx railway games, though there are a variety of other attractions, including Source of the Nile, a multi-player game open to all. There is an email version of this zine, **For Whom the Web Rocks**, <http://freespace.virgin.net/fwtwr.games/fwtwr/>. This features different games, all running at £1 a game.

This will be an occasional column, news of new Zines (or existing ones who reply to our enquiries) will be covered in Spokesmen Speaks - and of course added to Galactic View!

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VALKYRIE

ACQUIRE

MARK STRETCH with at look at this Classic Boardgame ...

OVER THE years there have been many economic board games published. A lot have quickly vanished but a few have proved popular and have endured. Amongst these is the Sid Sackson game **Acquire**. This was first published by 3M thirty years ago, though has since been published by Avalon Hill, Mayfair Games before becoming part of the Hasbro stable of games, where it is enjoying an upsurge in popularity after the publication of a deluxe version last year. Acquire is one of those games which has very simple rules yet a lot of strategic depth. Like Settlers of Catan there is some luck in the game, but this is small compared to level of skill. This is what makes the game so enjoyable to play and replay.

The game is played on a grid (from A1 in the top left corner to I12). There are 108 tiles, each corresponding to one of the squares on the board. There are seven companies in the game, each of which has a marker token and 25 shares. The companies are split into three categories, two expensive, two cheap and three intermediate in value. To start the game, everybody takes a tile and places it on the board to give a starting position. This also conveniently decides the order of play, with whoever drew the tile with the first letter starting. Each player then draws six tiles and takes his starting capital (\$6,000) from the bank and the game is ready to begin.

Each player on his turn does the following three things in order:

- 1 Plays a tile on the corresponding square on the board.
- 2 Buys up to three shares in any of the floated companies (which can be three of the same company, three single shares from different companies or a 2-1 split), provided there are the shares left in the bank.
- 3 Takes a replacement tile to bring you back up to six.

Companies are formed when a player plays a tile which is adjacent to one or more other tiles. Whoever plays the tile chooses which company to form and places the appropriate marker on the chain. He gets a free share in that company and the company is now floated. The share price is dependent on which chain was floated and how many connected tiles there are making up that chain. As more tiles are added by the players to the chain, the share price slowly increases. As the game goes on various companies will be formed. Sooner or later a player will play a tile which links two or more companies. In this case the larger company takes over the smaller company (in the event of a tie the survivor is chosen by the person playing the tile). The token of the company being taken over is removed and the surviving company will end up a lot larger as a result.

However, there is a benefit for those owning shares in the company being taken over. Bonuses are paid out to those with the most shares in the former company. Whoever had most shares gets a bonus equal to ten times the share price. Whoever had second most gets half that as a bonus. In addition, starting with whoever played the tile, all players get to dispose of their old defunct shares. They have three options:

- 1 Selling them for face value (this is the only time that shares can be sold).
- 2 Keeping them in anticipation of the company being reformed later in the game.
- 3 Trading pairs in for a single share in the surviving company. Should a player wish he can do a combination of the above.

Once a company has eleven or more tiles in its chain then it is safe and can no longer be taken over. If there are a number of such chains, then any tiles that would merge them are unplayable and should be discarded to be replaced at the end of your turn. The game ends when either all chains left are safe or one chain contains 41 or more tiles. At this point, bonuses are paid out for the companies left (as happens in mergers), and everyone adds up the value of their cash and shares. Whoever has the most is the winner.

As you will soon realise if you play the game, it is all about managing mergers. You will soon find yourself short of cash. Thus you need to

arrange for one of the companies in which you have shares to be taken over. Of course you also want your companies to be large by the end of the game, in which case you need them to take over other companies. This trade off between capital growth and income is one of the key areas of the game. Acquire is best with four players (although it can take 3-6) as that provides the most challenging position with regards to capital growth versus cashflow. Fewer players leads to tight cashflow, whilst with more, players tend to be cash rich as mergers happen faster.

As mentioned at the start, Acquire has proved very popular over the years. In Britain the longest running tournament is at ManorCon, which has been running since the mid 1980s. Also popular is the tournament at the Mind Sports Olympiad, which this year was a very multinational affair attracting players from Germany, Italy, Japan, England and the US.

Acquire is also popular enough and simple enough to be played online. There are various places to play, the most user-friendly being Paul's games (<http://www.paulgames.com/>) though others such as netset also exist. The various different editions of the game over the years haven't changed any of the mechanics of the game. They are basically cosmetic changes. In this, Hasbro have done a very good job with the latest edition of the game, as this version looks and feels far more deluxe than previous versions. The only change with the game which Hasbro introduced and players didn't like was changing some of the company names to make it up to date and losing some of the old favourites as a result.

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Primus Inter Pares

How I became a Moderator

It's Because I Liked the Game so Much, says DARRYL ASHING ...

BACK IN 1994 I had just started my own business. Actually that's a small exaggeration: what I had done was joined my (future) wife Nafisa's Chartered Accountancy practice as a partner, but it certainly felt like starting a business. More importantly I discovered I had no clients and hence no work. Apart from the minor problem of not knowing how I was going to eat, I also had the issue of how do I fill my time so it did not look like I was doing nothing. My solution was to spend a great deal of time posting messages on CIX (an Internet conferencing system).

It was whilst filling my time with valuable sales leads from CIX (cough) that I noticed a conference called PBM and being a hardened gamer in my spare time I stopped by. There I saw one dbwake (David Wake) posting about how a game of his needed some testers who did not live near him. By way of background David and Mike Ibeji had formed a business called Interesting Times that had several games in its stable.

[Aside: David Wake is a writer currently working on a situation comedy set in the Roman Army. The 'pilate' episode was recently performed in front of an audience in a rehearsed reading. David himself appeared as the third legionary on the left with the broken leg.]

[Aside: Mike Ibeji put his Phd in Ancient Roman history to one side and is now working in the media as a producer and director. He worked on the BBC's recent 'History of Britain', but not on the Roman episode. He still rolls the dice occasionally.]

Amongst which was one called **Primus Inter Pares**, which sounded right up my street. This was billed as being a close simulation of Republican Roman politics. Now I have always had a fascination with Republican Rome, the brothers Gracchi in particular.

[Aside: The Gracchi brothers, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, were early radical reformers of the Roman state. Both met an abrupt end at the hands of various patrician lynch mobs. They were radical in that they proposed sweeping changes by using the tribunate in unorthodox ways. In many respects they met their fates more because they outraged sensibilities rather than because of their political program. Naturally they were my inspiration.]

Well, having a surfeit of time on my hands and seeing that the price was a very reasonable £4 for a month's worth of gaming, I thought I'd give it a go. Within short order, a rulebook of fairly daunting thickness (about 60 pages) hit my doormat. I gave it a cursory glance and figured out how to set up my family: the rest could follow. I asked for a list of other players (atmospherically called a Quid Est Quid) and waited to see what would happen.

Well, I received an emailed ASCII file which confused me for a while as it had a bizarre series of numbers as its file extension (sorry for non-PC users here) but I eventually figured out that the trick here was to swap the numbers to the from and add an extension my computer would recognise (like .wri back then). And the result of this mammoth exercise in computer

hacking? Some of the best entertainment you can have in a game without actually doing anything!

All my orders had involved was setting up my family by creating two characters (one for politics and one for trade), sacrificing to Jupiter (seemed like an important god!) and giving them a name (Sempronii of course! See the explanatory Aside). Aside from showing me the state of my family, the turn also showed me Rome's inventory of buildings, who were this year's officers and various other important things (like rumours and market prices).

However, and this is the important bit, at the end is the recent history of what has been happening in Rome (and a little bit about the rest of Italy I suppose, but that's not important). I could see other people's speeches, people suing and impeaching one another, marriages being organised, gladiatorial games and circuses being held and so much else it was difficult to follow what to do! Anyway, I mastered this problem by ignoring it and turning to the list of players in the Quid. Here something very obvious was going on. The bulk of the players (about half at this time) were all based in Birmingham (both David and Mike had been to Birmingham University and the initial playtesters were friends from that time). Reading back through the history and looking at the top dogs (the people who were currently consuls in Rome) it was also very clear that the Birmingham crowd had sewn things up. They met regularly, decided who would stand in the next few elections and vote for one another's candidates and effectively locked out all other players. What to do to climb the slippery pole?

I read through the rest of the Quid marking all those players who lived outside Birmingham and prepared to send them a (sad to say) form letter suggesting that life voting for one another's candidates was better than watching the Birmingham crowd out vote us individually. I then noticed that Mike Ibeji (one of the developers) was also living away from Birmingham (Kent in fact) and did not have a proconsul in his family. The perfect ally! I called Mike and offered an alliance. He explained that in the real world he was far too busy to pay the game much attention. I said that I would be his campaign manager and would get him elected in less than six years. In exchange he'd have to trust me and finance me. He agreed.

At this point I should say this was the start of enjoyable friendship with Mike, and as with many PBM gaming friendships one that took quite a while to develop beyond postal and telephonic contact! Eventually Mike invited himself around to stay one night and I was shocked to find a be-hatted giant on my doorstep, but that's another story.

Anyway, Mike's main character to this point had been agitating to be elected consul. As he could not muster the votes by himself to overcome the Birmingham clique he was getting his main character (S Licinius Valerianus) elected tribune year after year and was throwing various spanners in the works (vetoing laws, candidates for elections etc). As you can imagine, this was not making him popular, rather like the Gracchi brothers (in fact, Mike once told me he now knew what Tiberius Gracchus must have felt!). As opposition to his tactics grew, Valerianus adopted stronger and stronger actions.

Now, have I mentioned the peregrines? I think not. These are player-run positions outside the main city and, although lacking the political side of things, have the scope for mixing it up by having more characters (at least to start). One of the peregrines was playing the unimaginatively named Gaulish Horde, which was progressing its way slowly down Italy's west coast towards Rome. Our forces, such as they were had either been brushed aside or had fallen back on Rome itself. At this point Valerianus

Primus Inter Pares at a glance

Historical powergame from Interesting Times Ltd, with turn charges at £6 per month.

Darryl Ashing at a glance

Darryl is co-owner of Interesting Times Games Limited and a severely overworked father of two.



over-reached himself; he called a *secessio*. This was the ancient Roman tribune's nuclear weapon, a strike. Historically it meant that the lower class plebes left Rome and allowed the upper class patricians to ponder the futility of ruling an empty city. To get this into game terms, a *secessio* disbands a legion based in Rome.

As you can imagine this was popular as hot-dogs at a Bar Mitzvah. At the next gathering of the Birmingham clique, the rather obvious suggestion of terminating Valerianus with extreme prejudice was floated. This was met with great reluctance, but after they'd watched the BBC animated Shakespeare *'Julius Caesar'* over a few beers there was no stopping them. The die was cast. There began an extended game of cat and mouse. Various Patrician families would launch a conspiracy and Valerianus would have roughly a month to uncover it, which with startling success he did.

In the end I pulled it off. Just about everyone outside Birmingham voted for Valerianus for consul and he was elected in the teeth of Patrician opposition: we'd done it. Unfortunately, within a few dies (oops, days) the last conspiracy also came off and Valerianus joined his ancestors. To say this was the defining moment of the game is a mild understatement. For the next four real world years (some fifty years in game) the conflict was between those who championed wider participation in the elections and those who did not. Other fights and feuds would develop but this conflict was the longest lasting.

There were immediate consequences. My main character at the time, T Sempronius Salinator was tribune when Valerianus was assassinated. He opposed those who killed his friend throughout his life and saw all of them brought low and eventually climbed to the consulship and thence to be censor and finally Pontifex Maximus and to gain Patrician status for his own family. But he never forgot his radical roots and eventually committed suicide on a point of principle (or after committing outrageous acts as his enemies put it).

[Aside: M Livius Salinator was another favourite character of mine this time dating back to the Punic war against Hannibal. Salinator had been impeached and found guilty some years before of some minor case of corruption and had borne a grudge about it ever since. During the darkest days Rome found that all her competent or experienced generals were either dead or operating in theatres at a very great distance away. In its hour of need the Senate turned to, you guessed it Salinator. He threw a tantrum saying that if he was corrupt the Senate certainly should not appoint him. Q Fabius Maximus Cunctator then got up and told him to stop whining and get on with it. Salinator won a famous victory defeating Hannibal's brother Hamilcar as he entered Italy to reinforce his brother. I love any government system that can place its future into the hands of someone it has called a criminal.]

So why have I bored you with this old post mortem? Well, late in 2000 I found that life as a father with a small child and another on the way was just not full enough for me and I decided I'd like to get involved with gaming again. I was still playing in Primus but things had fallen somewhat from its heyday. A lot of players had dropped out after a particularly acrimonious episode (involving a disputed election to Pontifex Maximus). David was not very involved with the running of the game and egregious program errors were not being addressed despite having been raised by players with the referees over the better part of two years. Unfortunately the game had passed through a series of referees which had not helped. That said, a large number of players had stuck with the game for many real years (in my case six, in other cases even more), because as one player said to me, 'It is the finest simulation of politics there is.'

I approached David and asked how I could help regain the glory days of the game. He was very enthusiastic, saying that he had not been able to devote any real time to the game because of his burgeoning new career as a scriptwriter. We struck a deal and I prepared to go away and have some ideas.

At this point events overtook us. My life got very complicated and I won't bore you with the details. More relevantly the current referee of Primus decided to call it a day and said he wanted to hand over moderating the game to someone else! Fortunately we had a willing stand-in, Nafisa who was planning on being a full time mother. So Nafisa and I went to Birmingham and had some training in how to use the program. Nafisa found coping with a two year old whilst feeling sick all the time did not leave her feeling like she wanted to moderate a PBM game. Non-gamers eh? They just don't have the sticking power! I found myself moderating the game by default whilst trying to hold my life together. I suspect that turnaround suffered somewhat during this period.

At this point things finally started going right. Several players gave me some very positive feedback in terms of suggestions to improve the game, pointers for new players and offers to write supporting material for the game. David and I laid our plans for world domination. Next time I shall go into detail about the difference between being a player and a referee and the fine line walked between looking after old players and attracting new ones.

Glossary (in order as mentioned in the text, I hope)

Consul - literally 'colleague', the highest ranking, if not most impressive, magistrate in Republican Rome. Initially reserved for Patricians.

Censor - one of the most prestigious posts in Rome, responsible for running annual census and ensuring people are enrolled in the correct class. Reserved for Patricians.

Pontifex Maximus - the High Priest of Rome. The most prestigious if stunningly powerless post in the game.

Patricians - the aristocracy of Rome.

Plebes - everyone else.

Classes - Senator, *Eques* - knight, *Assidui* - workers, *Capite Censi* - head count, freedmen. Note that slaves don't count as people at all!

Tribune - a special officer elected by the Plebes to safeguard their interests. A tribune had the power to veto just about anything and to harm one was to cause severe rioting by the Plebes!

Praetor - A magistrate ranking just below consul who had powers to impeach and judge criminal and civil cases.



[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 September 15th

Duncan Chisholm, Stuart Fieldhouse, Colin Forbes, Patrick Gleeson, Greg Lamb, Steve Mason, Joe McCarthy, A Moulds, Carol Mulholland, Neil Murdoch, Matthew Riley, Jonathan Shushan, Graham Sproston, Peter Thornhill, Ben Williams, Wayne Yeadon.

GAMES FEATURED THIS ISSUE

Middle Earth PBM

Matthew Riley - 'I've always found Clint & his lads to be courteous and helpful. I know that we come to expect those standards from PBM companies but they should still be appreciated!

The occasional error does creep into the processing of turns but they will bend over backwards to correct what they can.

All in all they have made playing Middle Earth a very enjoyable part of my recreation time and I'd like to put those comments on the public record!

Jonathan Shushan - 'This is one of the most enjoyable PBM games I've ever played. I've been in PBM for about 12 years now and this one is fun.

This is primarily because of the breadth of the system. To be more exact, this is really three games in one. First, an army game wherein the players move and fight armies on a map in a similar fashion to board gaming. This is a simplified but fun module.

Secondly, it is an economic simulation complete with tax rates, commodity production, markets, with manipulable limits, trade routes etc. The economics are tied into the army game as various products, which can be purchased or "produced" by your population centres, are required to build various military units. The economics also impact the army game through the need for food, one of seven products, for movement and the need to pay your troops out of tax revenue, gold production or profits from market sales.

Finally, the last third of the game is a "D&D"-style character game complete with the usual magic artifacts, spells, wizards, heroes, bad guys, etc. This ties into the army and economic games because all army and economic actions must be taken by one's heroes within a strictly limited number of orders.

I also enjoy the game because of the multiple player interaction, unpredictable neutral actions and other "personal" aspects of the game.

While the system is not perfect and could use an improvement or two, endlessly debated within the MEPBM "community", it is overall a quite addictively fun game and I would recommend it to any player with any interest in the fantasy genre of PBM.'

Steve Mason - 'I've never ever before played a fantasy PBM. Previous

to Middle Earth the only PBMs I've played have been football sims - what a change! When I received the start-up pack I was astounded at the size of the rulebook. It was easily five times the size I'm used to and the map was something new to me as well. I ploughed through the rules and orders list and, to be honest, I was terrified! I've never seen so many orders and I've also been told that ME is quite light compared to other games.

When the game started I was confused by the sheets and didn't have a clue what to do, but I've got it now, mainly thanks to the help of the other players in my game.

As far as the game itself goes it's probably the best PBM I've ever played. The amount of contact between players was surprising as well as refreshing. At first I thought the two week turnaround was too long, but I soon found out the reasons! Every time you look at your sheets there's something you missed or overlooked and you're never short of something to do with it.

The one thing I like best is the way the game is set up. Once you're out - you're out! There aren't any second chances. I've never been kept on my toes so much in any other game. Hopefully I'll be able to stay on them until the end of the game. If there is one thing I see as a flaw it's that experienced players seem to know exactly what's happening, when it's happening and as such they seem to follow the same pattern over and over again. Does this not become tedious for some of you? It would for me. I realise that every game is different - but they aren't #that# different. Anyway, that's the only flaw I see in the game and with this being my first game it doesn't apply to me anyway.'

Patrick Gleeson - 'Game 118 is hotting up, with the Corsairs getting aggressive and attacking me early in the game. Fair enough, it makes for some interesting turns! Hopefully my Dark Servant allies will be able to send agent support soon, though. I'm impressed with the service offered by Harlequin, so much better than the less than professional company running the game when I first played Middle Earth. If you used to play, but don't any more, I'd heartily recommend giving the game another go. Moreover, Harlequin are keen on setting up new scenarios and special one-off games, so there's always something new to try!'

Colin Forbes - 'As ever the games are running smoothly in terms of the excellent service provided by Harlequin / MEPBM Games, though of course the same cannot be said of in-game activities! At present I'm in six games (I can give it up any time, honest!) including at least one of each of the three basic scenarios on offer.

Game 20 (TA: 2850)

This game has been going on for a mammoth 80+ turns! Normally games seem to take between 10 and 30 turns, but this one has turned into a marathon. I'm playing a Dark Servant and for many turns we were more or less besieged in Mordor. However, over the past ten turns or so, the tide has turned and we have not only gained the upper hand in the character war (cursing and assassinating many enemy characters) but we have even managed to send some armies out onto the plains, to some effect it has to be said. Still, the enemy has many cities and a large array of skilled characters at their disposal, so it seems likely that it will be many turns before this war is resolved. Highly enjoyable!

Game 25 (TA: 2950)

This is what is known as a grudge game. That is, there were two teams of twelve at gamestart, with the neutrals divided up from the beginning. I'm playing with a team mostly comprised of relative newcomers to the game - this is only their second game. Harlequin sensibly put one or two seasoned players in to help them out, and we not only won our first game, but seem to be on course for a good result in this game as well. Team communication is excellent (all via email as many of the team live in Greece) and we even have a full-colour all-singing, all-dancing game map produced each turn. This really helps players to see the overall situation each turn and plan their moves accordingly. Probably the most enjoyable game I'm in, because despite that fact that it's a team game there is not too much of the centralised control that can irk somewhat in some games.

Game 42 (FA: 1000)

This is only my second Fourth Age game, and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. The ability to pick your own position and assign points to build characters

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Epic
Fantasy
in
DungeonWorld

Free Play
in the
Broken
Lands

Madhouse ...
the darker
side.



however you want them at gamestart can be very attractive to veteran MEPBM players. That said, I would be cautious about recommending this version of the game to people who have not played one of the other scenarios before (or recently). I started this one as one of a team of three neutral nations and, now that the deadline for allegiance declaration has passed, we find ourselves lined up alongside a decent number of other neutral nations against the tyrannical Free Peoples of the South. The poor Dark Servants have mostly vanished from the face of Middle Earth.

Game 59 (TA: 1650)

I can't say too much about this game, as it's the second leg of the UK World Championship team's match against the powerful and well-organised team from the USA. We lost the first game in what can only be described as an embarrassingly short time. This one is going somewhat better. Although we are on the back foot in some areas, we have the advantage in others - a good struggle this one. Plans are afoot to ... well, I could tell you, but then I'd have to make this magazine explode.

Game 77 (TA: 1650)

Another grudge game, this time I'm playing with most of the Harlequin GMs and some of their friends from Cardiff. This game has added spice as I know the opposing Dark Servant team captain fairly well (hi Andy!). Another game which has a terrific amount of communication (again mostly via email). Having smashed through into the Ithil Pass early on in the game, the Free People juggernaut has been halted at the Fire King capital of Barad Ungol (sorry, that should read, ex-capital!) and a serious struggle is developing in other areas of the world. I won't mention events in Angmar, as I have no wish to embarrass the opposition.

Game 118 (TA: 1650)

I am playing Harad, a neutral in the south of Middle Earth and have been watching events elsewhere with interest. From what I can gather this is not a grudge game, with the result that neither team is that well organised. The Quiet Avenger and the Corsairs seem engaged in an unnecessary war (which can only do me favours). I am still pondering my next move and would encourage both teams to contact me! Unlike the majority of Middle Earth games, this runs to a three week turnaround, giving plenty of time for more traditional postal communication and diplomacy.'

Kings of Karadon

Colin Forbes - 'Game 1 has now re-started following a delay caused by real life problems for the GM. My nation, Pryanor, is tucked away in a nice safe area of the world. Safe? What am I saying! There's massive famine across the world caused by a magical winter; Lizardmen have invaded a nearby marsh and no-one seems to know where they come from; something called a Chaos Pit has been seen on my borders and is growing in power - and that's only in my part of the world.'

Duncan Chisholm - 'Hurrah! Game 1 is back and my sad obsession with this excellent and incredibly deep game can recommence. Hunky Monkey put their games on hold over the summer following a death in the family, but things are now getting going again.'

In game 1, subtitled "The Great Winter", my position is that of an island nation peopled by what can only be described as Sea Ogres. They're nice lovable creatures really, not at all how you might imagine them to be! Over the course of the game I have been able to substantially define their culture and goals, it really is very much like roleplaying a nation. Yes, of course there is a lot of economic stuff going on, not to mention the need to maintain an army (and in my case a navy as well) to beat off the various threats from players and non-players alike, but the free-form special actions mean you have an excellent opportunity to delve into whatever areas of the game interest you the most. Oh, and I haven't even mentioned the free-form quests, the speeches you can make in Guild meetings or Religious Conclaves and the eight-page newsletter which comes with each turn. From the look of things there are currently some choice positions available, so drop Hunky Monkey a line and see if you can get into this game!

Dungeonworld

Wayne Yeadon - 'Now trying out the free online version of this called Broken Lands, just to see how different it is. There are some restrictions from the normal game, but these should not prove to be too much of a hindrance. Playing a free character is not to be sniffed at if you enjoy the game! Hope the weekly turnaround is dropped though, as I would much prefer unlimited turns or at least one per day.'

Quest GME

Wayne Yeadon - 'The rulebook underwent a revision after player feedback and now features more explanations of how things work. Improvements still coming in too, so lots to think about. Some aspects may still need tweaking as players are adopting combat styles that make armour pretty much useless. Maybe they will come unstuck at some point when others find a way to defeat them, unless there is an imbalance in styles?'

Playing in three of the moderated game worlds, I notice that the same types of quests are given in each world. Whilst it would be better not to see such duplicity, I can appreciate why it happens and it must be intriguing for Bat (the GM) to see how players deal with the same problems.

Some alliances are reaching rank 2 now, which brings added abilities, so this will be worth keeping an eye on, to see how things develop. In game 31 we have reached a stage where one alliance is seriously under threat from another alliance and may well fold unless something drastic happens. Offers have been made for the alliance to relocate, but they are standing firm! Most of the game's alliances got involved in this dispute too, which has been a major event in this game so far.'

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

The Chevia Chronicles

Colin Forbes - 'Turnaround is picking up, with the GM's Open University courses for the year having come to an end. In the lands of Chevia, though, all is far from well. The Goblins seem poised for a major invasion and we don't really have much of an army to speak of to oppose them. Ooops. Suffice it to say, my character is doing his utmost to drum up new recruits - a massive denouement to the game seems imminent.'

Einstein's Lot

Carol Mulholland - 'Alison's had a nasty moment, with slithery snakey sounds following her on a country lane, shudder, but at least she's managed to crack a mysterious inscription from early on in the game. Now she's in an old church, where she's discovered a memorial to a forebear who may have been the original Ancient Mariner, but who's suffered a grisly end. She ventures down into the crypt, to discover nothing more dangerous than a gossipy old lady mending the vestments. But what's the scratching noise from behind the ancestral memorial? Certainly not workmen on the staircase behind it, ulp.'

I like the decorous pace, and the way that Chris can spring surprises. Everything seems so normal - and then, suddenly...'

Stuart Fieldhouse - 'Given a busy lifestyle, this may be the RPG for you, as it does not have fixed deadlines. It seems to be a British answer to the X-Files, but characters tend to be ordinary bods in contemporary England. The characters are pretty flexible too - I'm playing a somewhat roguish construction engineer, not exactly the stereotypical character for this kind of RPG setting, but the game seems to be accommodating him easily.'

Although I've only managed to complete one turn so far, I can attest that the standard of writing is very good, and the GM gives you plenty of food for thought at the end of his reports. No idea what is going on, mind you, but I like that element of mystery.'

En Garde! Dangerous Liaisons

Stuart Fieldhouse - 'A very high quality EG offering, with room for more players. Set in France in the middle of the 16th century, about a century earlier than the traditional EG setting, this is still amusing fayre. There is a nod to the religious strife France was facing at this time, but in three game months I've not seen this getting in the way of the activities of the characters. The game has a number of intriguing facets that I have yet to fully explore, but certainly the availability of female PCs, the vigorous parliamentary scene, and the infamous "dangerous liaisons" of the title piece all seem worth exploring. There doesn't seem to be much duelling going on, but one PC was recently killed on campaign, and another seems to have been kidnapped, so there is no shortage of action without the need for traditional duels.'

En Garde! Les Petites Betes Soyeuses

Colin Forbes - 'The game continues to regular turnaround, presented in an attractive A5 booklet form as part of the "To Win Just Once" Zine from veteran En Garde! GM Paul Evans. My character Guy de Lynes is engaged in a good deal of socialising at the moment, though the demands of my mistress must also not be ignored. Far too soon for much politics on my part, I simply don't have the social level - maybe it's time to head off to fight the enemies of France again.'

Worlds Apart

A Moulds - 'This new game started up a few months ago. It's a single-character, hand-moderated, fantasy roleplaying game, run by Colin Andrews. If you have access to email, you can contact Colin on colchem@netscape.net where I am sure that he will be only too happy to answer any questions you may have. Some of your readers may remember that Colin used to run a very successful area in Saturnalia.

Players can start the game with a new character. They can also start the game with a character they already have in another fantasy RPG. If you desire to bring a character from another game into the game, you should give as many details of that character's history to Colin as you can, so that he can work the details of the character into the game.

The game has (?)four different worlds you can choose to start your character in. These worlds are:

Malbolge: a world of wind-swept plains and nomadic tribesmen,
Corinth: a world of knights and a feudal society. This is the world I chose to set my character in, but I should warn you if this is the world you decide to start your character in, be prepared for shocks.
Frigial: as the name suggests, a world of ice and snow, where life is a continual struggle.
Xanthus: a world of chaos. A world of mountains and large, dark swamps. Who can tell what they contain?

In the rulebook there are fuller descriptions of all four worlds. The reason for the (?) above is that on his travels my character may have stumbled across another world. If he decides to enter this new world, who knows what "delights" my character will find?

As I have said, the game is new and although the worlds are set up ready to be explored, the characters' actions can have a great effect on the world they start in, if this is what they choose to do. When I say this, don't get the idea that players will be able to run the game and that they can control the GM. The players control their characters and their actions, and Colin controls the world and all the characters the players come across. Unless that other character is another player's character.

Having said this, Colin is always willing to hear suggestions from players. Although he may not always act on these suggestions.

Anyway, that's enough of my ramblings. Before I finish I should like to say that the more a player puts into the game, the more the player will get out of it. My last turn was over six printed pages long.

I know that a reviewer for Flagship is taking part in the game to give a report on Worlds Apart, but this may not appear until next year. If you wait until his review appears, you will be missing out on a lot of enjoyment and fun.'

Peter Thornhill, our reviewer - 'Worlds Apart, from Colin Andrews, ex-Saturnalia GM, is a single character hand-moderated fantasy PBM, set in an unusual group of worlds linked by magical forces. Whilst set-up and game mechanics are relatively standard, the game differs from others, in my experience, in that the worlds are not kind benign places populated with happy-go-lucky characters all too willing to help the player in his quest. Instead the worlds are riddled with violence, racial intolerance and a pantheon of gods who are as likely to strike you down for having the impertinence to ask as to grant you any kind of favour. Not only that, but you are faced with an implacable GM who seems to delight in putting your character in as awkward a position as he can and then split his sides laughing at your attempts to get out. Don't expect to be led by the nose either; you will be expected to contribute to the game as you go along and only those players with drive, ambition and enthusiasm need apply.

If you like your fantasy soft and fluffy, look elsewhere; if you are prepared to face up to a rough, tough world, full of violence and hard decisions, get in contact with Colin soon.'

TRIBAL GAMES

Bledian Diary

Peter Thornhill - 'Hard-core tribal game for hard-core tribal fanatics (which I am!). I like the element of this game where actions in the game take real time to happen so you can put in a turn as fast as you like but, if your blacksmiths are still making that last lot of swords that you ordered, they're not available to make anything else until they've finished. Each turn is at least a dozen pages long, with many of them detailing your tribe's current stocks and equipment; careful study is required to glean information about what changes and improvements have been made. Turnround could be quicker but, in general, a good game with plenty to keep me playing for a number of years yet.'

Crack of Doom

Peter Thornhill - 'Relatively new to this, and another tribal game that bears close examination. Crack of Doom is definitely not cheap but it is value for money; most turn responses run to at least a page of GM input in reply to your six special actions and GM John has a wicked sense of humour which adds greatly to the game. Life is less harsh here than others of its like but don't make the mistake of believing that will give you an easy ride; there are dark forces afoot and the constant feeling that you are only on the outer fringes of what is really going on.'

HISTORICAL WARGAMES

Gunboat Diplomacy

Stuart Fieldhouse - 'As the name suggests, Victorian hijinks in East Asia in the 1880s. Imagine a blend of Tai Pan and Flashman if you will. Players control enterprises of one kind or another, running their positions to a tight budget that forces you to account for individual bullets and shell out for uniforms. It is run in traditional Agema style, with most of the information coming in the form of a newsletter rather than a detailed turnsheet. This can be frustrating at times when some secret actions are not commented on in either the turn return or the newsletter, leaving you somewhat in the dark about their progress. I was particularly frustrated when a GM query was misinterpreted as an order, leading to 50 of my troops being massacred on the Manchurian border! Still, it has a good crew of players who seem to enjoy the somewhat tongue-in-cheek spirit with which the game is conducted. Despite my criticisms, it is still enjoyable.'

MODERN WARGAMES

Crisis!

Colin Forbes - 'A nice, easy game to play which can result in backstabbing savagery on the part of other players. My advice? Get a couple of allies and plan your own stab better than your opponents!'

This will appeal to anyone who wants a wargame that is simple to play, but offers more scope than traditional games like Diplomacy.'

EMPIRE-BUILDING GAMES

Prometheus

Patrick Gleeson - 'Game 1 is going well. I've just stumbled across two other nations, and diplomacy is now under way - vital, since one of the nations is worryingly close by. I think a war can be avoided, though, we all have far better things to do with our resources! That said, I suspect it would be easy enough to play this as an out-and-out wargame from the off. I can only hope that neither of the nations I have just met have gone down that path! The GM has recently made some improvements to the print quality which make the maps much easier to read. I'm looking forward to the next game starting!'

Ben Williams - 'I'd like to express my appreciation to the GM for keeping the game running over a summer that has been very difficult for him personally. The game itself is highly enjoyable, the sort of game one can play without too much intensive diplomacy (at this stage, at least). It's simple to play, but I always look forward to the results coming back.'

Colin Forbes - 'I'm about to establish my fourth settlement, and am at last making some technological progress. Orders are getting longer with each turn, and I'm going to hit the limit if I'm not careful. Fortunately you can stack orders up for units, towns and so forth if need be, and even define your own orders to take the place of several normal orders - useful if you keep having to issue the same orders (eg move caravan, pick up wood, move it back, unload wood - instead of four orders, this can be done with one customisable order).'

SPORTS GAMES

Premier League Fantasy Football

Neil Murdoch - 'I'm aghast to see Mr Sproston's right of reply in your last issue. For one thing, I have it in black and white: my turn sheets with the league table stating that the games played were 22 games out of 38, not five or eight as claimed by Mr Sproston.'

I still have the email that he sent me saying a refund was due to me, but I've still not received monies due to me.

As for him saying the league went for 48 weeks, what utter rubbish - 20 teams in a league, home and away would be 38 games in a league!!

He knows that he has accepted my money; he knows that I was not contacted; even after several notices I put up on his yahoo club's pages, looking for answers to my queries, he did not reply, to inform me of the situation with the game.

Mr Sproston is wrong, wrong, wrong. I would still like to know what charity he gave the so called prize money to. Are there any receipts of this? I have a right to know, as my weekly credits was part of this prize money.'

GM Graham Sproston takes his Right of Reply - 'I must reply. Nice to see Neil still alive and kicking.

Firstly let's get the maths right!! 20 teams equals 19 home matches and 19 away matches. This much is true. Now let's add the little cup competitions that we run which Mr Murdoch obviously hasn't heard of, like the Premier League Fantasy Football F.A.Cup and the Premier League Fantasy Football League Cup, each containing a 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th rounds. All these rounds are played on separate weeks, so by my calculations that is 10 more weeks!!! That is a total of 48 weeks which the game runs for each year leaving a 4-week break.

Now to the reading of Mr Murdoch's messages. Like all you readers already know from last issue's message, our computers went down, which does happen from time to time. We will explain this to Mr Murdoch. Computers "down" means that the computer is NOT working. Therefore we could not access the clubpage for our www.plff.co.uk site, thus meaning that we couldn't read your messages. Simple.

Mr Murdoch also didn't start the game from week 1 so even though his sheets say week 22 out of 48 weeks he actually only played about

eight or nine games in the league with a cup thrown in for good measure. Don't get me wrong, Mr Murdoch was a good player whilst he was with us despite thinking that he was the "son of vernon"! And also thinking that he was God!! We sent the money via cheque and I now have my bank checking where the cheque was cashed. If it wasn't, Mr Murdoch, then I will apologise right here and now and will send him another £10 cheque in the next ten days or so despite only owing him £6.75. That can be your Christmas bonus in way of a sorry.

We at Premier League Fantasy Football and Premier Tips do not hold grudges and would even take Mr Murdoch back on at any time in the future if he ever considered joining again. Oh and thanks for Carol from the Flagship for your dealing of the situation in such a professional manner and sorry to take up too much of your printing space!'

[All part of the service, but it's nice to be thanked. Looks as if the refund will get through OK now: Neil had changed his address without - oops! - informing the firm.]

Kickabout

Peter Thornhill - 'Near the end of my first season and near the bottom of the lowest division in the league; but definitely looking forward to next season! This is not as accurate a football simulation as, say, the PC game Championship Manager, but there is an awful lot to keep track of and many of the decisions you take will have far-reaching consequences. Do you take a risk and play a low-level player now in hopes that he will gain extra qualifying games and become a better player in the future? Do you play with extra aggression in a local derby against your hated rivals and risking losing players through suspension? The decision is up to you and the best part is... you can't get sacked!!'

PAFL

Peter Thornhill - 'Stalled throughout the summer whilst the GM fulfils a long-standing promise and decorates his front room! Yes, real-life even affects GMs on the odd occasion. Still the best American football simulation on the market and, if you like Gridiron and don't play PAFL, you need your head examined... probably by a Chicago Bears linebacker!'

BWA - live (yes, live!)

Wayne Yeadon - 'Parish Hall has been and gone and I survived through not doing much in the way of actual wrestling, preferring to act as cameraman for most of the event. This one was a cut above the last show I took part in, as everyone made a real effort this time with costumes etc. It was great fun meeting Chris Dickson and Greg Lamb who feature in these pages. The events just aren't the same without Chris doing his host bit. I can't wait for the release of this on video!'

ABPW

Wayne Yeadon - 'Another turn arrives and boy, its another good one as far as my characters are concerned. I am doing rather well it seems, although titles have not been awarded yet. My next turn should be a make or break turn really, as I have one extremely tough match against an old WPBM star making his debut in this game!'

WOW

Wayne Yeadon - 'You wait ages for a turn from any wrestling game and they all turn up at once! Seems like some sort of conspiracy to me. I can't complain though as this one goes very well for all my wrestlers, retaining titles and actually gaining one, for my all time loser. This was a shock to the system. My rookie is on a winning streak too, so it will be interesting to see how long that will last.'

Federation X, RIP

Greg Lamb - 'Sadly folded and much missed. Fed X gave WPBM something of a shot in the arm during its year or so of existence, releasing

quality turns at a pace no longer thought possible. Hopefully something can be salvaged from the ashes - whether in the form of stars born in Fed X moving into other games, or the Fed X belts being defended in inter-promotional events, it won't be forgotten. Personally, Fed X gave me an opportunity to get more involved with the larger WPBM scene and introduced me to a friendly community of players and GMs, as well as many classic matches.

It was great while it lasted.'

ARENA GAMES

Ksar Exo

Greg Lamb - 'Science Fiction? Futuristic War? Robot/Arena? - not quite sure what category it's in, to be honest ...

At the close of the penultimate turn. Off went the final set of orders, and back came the report. Somehow, with a final scoreline of 725 to 707, we'd managed to snatch another victory at the last moment, giving me a total of five team wins in five battles. Having spent much of the game on critical damage, desperately trying to cover my wounded side from multiple opponents and attack at the same time, my personal performance was fairly poor, although a desperate flanking manoeuvre on the last turn brought my score up to a halfway respectable level.

Credit for the win, however, must go to my teammates. This was also my first outing in my own custom-built robot, which seemed effective enough if a little flimsier than I'd have liked. The game is still fun, still cheap, and still recommended to anyone who likes blowing stuff up from time to time.'

[Hmm, difficult, but we went for Arena Games in the end. Better add that the game is run (in English) by email by Terre de Jeu from France: isasol@club-internet.fr]

WEB-BASED GAMES

Tribe Net

Joe McCarthy - 'The fighting continues in the East of Brittany and the Staffords engage in see-saw battles with the mysterious Simians, and their unknown ally. No fewer than six sub-tribes were destroyed in a massive battle caused by the tribes literally blundering into each other. The Simians are reported to have rose up in fury and a mighty battle is being fought with the Staffords, but reports from that war-torn land are scarce and sketchy. The casualties are known to number in the thousands. Many tribes are now asking, can the Staffords support such a bloody war?

The Bushido tribes of Yamato and the Yongoe Gitters have moved from their holdings on the shores of Lake Purraj and reports are coming in of fighting along a river running near the lake. So far the Bushido hordes have shown no sign of trying to rescue their beleaguered comrade, the Staffords, from their bloody stalemate.

The Sbaras are back to their old bandit ways, with raids again being conducted on the edges of Smurfturf. Quick mounted units, too weak to fight a pitched battle but well strong enough to lop off isolated groups of people, are reported in the Western and Southern reaches of the Land of the Smurfs, and there have been some casualties. However no threat is being posed to the growing Smurf State.'

Peter Thornhill - 'Have just dropped out of this game, not because it wasn't enjoyable, but mainly because I couldn't see where it was going! Early turns are a constant struggle against the elements and the lack of equipment that your tribe has but, gradually, things began to turn round for the tribe and I began to think about the next phase. Trouble was, I couldn't see what that was! I am not a particularly war-like games player and the only source of outlet for my slaving hordes of highly-trained, fighting-fit forces (or the few chaps with sharp pointy sticks I had!) was to attack another player! I don't know if the game contains NPCs but I never found any trace of them or had them mentioned to me by other players. So what was the ultimate point of this constant struggle to feed the tribe so they could survive, grow, make weapons and prepare to

attack? Pick on another player who had only just started? Take on a highly developed well-trained tribe with far better equipment?

I enjoyed the game whilst I played it and, if I had been in an area where there was some kind of game politics going on, would have stayed.'

NEW GAMES

Bakufu

Stuart Fieldhouse - 'Currently delayed due to the GM's move to Northern Ireland (computer still the wrong side of the Irish Sea, I'm told). This is a team-based RPG set in a fantasy world with strong oriental leanings. That said, if you like playing bread-and-butter races likes elves, dwarves, and the ubiquitous orcs, these are here too, but touting a katana this time.

Although tempted to play a samurai, I finally succumbed to form and have gone with an elven scout. Kain tells me he hopes to get the first turn out before the end of November, so hopefully more can be said next time.'

**Please get all contributions for Flagship 95 to us by
January 1st 2002!**

Hall of Fame

LEGENDS - Harlequin Games

Swords of Pelarn 23 was won by the Grey Knights faction. All credit to:

C36 Fretar Thunderstruck (**Ross Inglis**)
C108 Sir Cedric Grimheart (**Paul Avent**)
C138 Gustus Moonstone (**Phil Austin**)
C140 Ferak Dirtwater (**James Davies**)
C150 Greywind (**Peter Waldie**)
C166 Sin (**Steve Toplis**)
C180 Kolmar (**Pete Tebb**)

KINGS OF STEEL - Stephen R White Game 66

1 - **Martin Lewis** - Druids
2 - **Stephen Moore** - Dwarves
3 - **Steve Brown** - Klasshii

XOTT - Antony Dunks

Congratulations to **Paul Fretwell** as winner of the NPC competition.

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



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

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

We also include Websites, Email addresses and 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 & WEB-BASED GAMES
There is no listing of New Entries, Deletions and Changes this issue, as we've substantially updated the listings!
Total: 141 active UK & Web-based GMS

- A&D Entertainment**, PO Box 108, Bacton, Stowmarket IP14 4RX
WEB: webmaster@facebook2.demon.co.uk
EM: www.facebook2.demon.co.uk
FAX: 01449 781916
- Absolom, Mike**, 96 Bishopwood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG
EM: MAbsolom@aol.com
WEB: <http://members.aol.com/SatSouthGM>
- Adrian Aramuro**
WEB: www.geocities.com/arc_engarde/
EM: adrian@arimuro.freemove.co.uk
- Agema Publications**, 3 Workshop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Snelton, Nottingham NG3 2BA
WEB: go.to/agema
- Albrecht, Chris von**
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/loie91/index.html
EM: loie91gm@yahoo.com
- Andrews, Colin**, 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG
- Apex Games**, POB 56, Gravesend, Kent DA11 9LT
- Bagley, Adrian**, 28 The Oaks, Lindsay Road, Branksome Park, Poole, Dorset BH13 6AP
TEL: 01202 767243 (after 6pm)
- Bartram, Giles**
WEB: www.pendula.net/~serge/centre_earth/arda/countries.html
EM: centreearth@yahoo.co.uk
- Baylis, Chris**, 67 Mychens, Lee Chapel North, Basildon, Essex SS15 5EG
- Boothroyd, Alex**, 30 Sawyer Drive, Biddulph, Staffordshire, ST8 6SU
EM: alex.boothroyd@virgin.net
- Brambley, Francis**
WEB: freemove.virgin.net/francis.brambley/ArkhamAdvertise.htm
EM: francis.brambley@virgin.net
- Brunt, Steve**, 20 Ringrose Close, Newark, Notts NG24 2JL
- Burd, Richard**, 83 Sandcroft, Sutton Hill, Telford, Shropshire TF7 4AD
EM: 100553.2107.compuserve.com
- Burroughs, Martin**, 15 New Earth St, Oldham OL4 5ES
TEL: 01952 413655
- Burrows, Pete**, Buzzack PBM, 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG
TEL: 0161 6261580
WEB: www.buzzackpbm.freemove.co.uk
EM: pete@buzzackpbm.freemove.co.uk
- Burrows, Martin**, 47 Greenfield Terrace, Newbridge, Gwent NP1 4OY
TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pr. 10pm)
- Bury, Chris**, World Fictional Wrestling, 1A Chapel Terrace, Southend, Essex SS1 1EX
- Callan, David**
EM: gortos@netcomuk.co.uk

- Camelot Games**, 6 Llys-Y-Foel, Caernarvon, Gwynedd LL55 2LU
- Campbell, Alex**, Families Centre, 1 BN REME, BFPO 36
- Carier, Dave**, **Scorpions**, 13 Liverpool Rd South, Burscough, Lancs L40 7SU
EM: dac@clara.net or ingbreck@aol.com
WEB: <http://www.scorpiongames.co.uk>
- Casey, Ashley**, 16 Willow Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4HP
WEB: www.ashcasey.co.uk
EM: serpent@ashcasey.co.uk
- Championship League**, PO Box 1966, Kilmarnock KA1 1BF
TEL: (Brian, Ian, Yvonne): 01563 3365151
FAX: 01563 336565
- Cleopatra Computer Games**, 83 Faringdon Avenue, Bromley, Kent BR2 8BU
- Coeshaw, Mark**, 10 Ellis Close, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8DW
- Coleman, Ian**
WEB: www.thera.org.uk/engarde.htm
EM: ian.coleman@utdgateway.net
- Colnar, Lorne**
WEB: www.lordslotheearth.co.uk/loie17/index.htm
EM: lorne@lordslotheearth.co.uk
- Cooksey, Dave**, 2 Penerton Rd, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 5LW
EM: dmcgames@aol.com
- Cooper, Quincy**
WEB: <http://timeofhonor.com/>
EM: TimeofHonor@aol.com
- Cozens, Richard**, 16 Fox Close, Boston, Lines PE21 8EE
WEB: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/r-cozens>
EM: r.cozens@ukonline.co.uk
- Craasworld**, 4 Barleyfield, Clayton-Le-Woods, Preston, Lancs PR5 8UQ
WEB: www.craasworld.com
EM: andy@craasworld.com
TEL: (Andy Smith): 01722 334878 (credit card hotline)
- Crofts, Richard**
WEB: www.chariot.net.au/~duncelin/engarde.html
EM: claudedelon@yahoo.com
- Cruikshank, Michael**, 52/4 Bryson Road, Edinburgh
EM: mcruikshank@ndworld.com
- Cyclops PBM**, 18 Knighton Road, Romford, Essex RM7 9BS
- Daredevil**, 178 Hall Lane, Upminster, Essex RM14 1AT
WEB: www.daredevil19.co.uk
EM: daredevil@daredevilers.jp.co.uk
- Darker Times**, The 176 College Street, Long Eaton, Nottingham NG10 4GX
EM: live2game@hotmail.com
- Dodd, Leslie**
WEB: www.lordslotheearth.co.uk/loie42/index.htm
EM: lords42gm@throneworld.com
- Draes Games**, 21 Chippertfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP
WEB: www.draesgames.co.uk
EM: derek@draesgames.co.uk
- Dunedin Games**, 65 Boswall Drive, Edinburgh EH5 2BE
TEL: (Derek Rainey): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)
- EM: dunedin@ Crombie68.freemove.co.uk**
- Dunks, Antony**, Fur Horizon, Sark, Guernsey GY9 0SE
WEB: <http://www.xot1.net>
EM: xot@xot1.net
TEL/FAX: 01481 832926
- Entertainment Plus More Games**
WEB: www.epmgames.com
EM: ag@epmgames.com
- Evans, Paul**, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF
EM: paul@pevans.co.uk
- Faraway Games**, 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS
EM: igibbons@faraway.co.uk
WEB: <http://www.faraway.co.uk/>
- Fearis Games**, PO Box 46, Rochester, Kent ME1 1UQ
EM: FearisGames@compuserve.com
- Flying Buffalo**
WEB: <http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/>
EM: games@flyingbuffalo.com
- Forgotten Front**
WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Castle/6834/index.html
EM: AdmiralDrummond@forgotten-front.co.uk
- Foster, J. Ten to Three**, 75 Frensham Road, Southsea, Hants PO4 8AE
- Fritz, Alan**
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/loie24/index.html
EM: lords24@throneworld.com
- Fryer, Richard**, 6 Flamingo Close, Wooshill, Wokingham, Berks, HP11 1SL
- Galactic Society Four**, 1 Peter Coats, 31 Caliside, Paisley, Scotland, PA2 6DB
WEB: www.gsfgames.co.uk
EM: graham@gsfgames.co.uk
- Games by Mail**, Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9UJ
WEB: GamesByMail.co.uk
EM: colin@gamesbymail.co.uk
TEL: (Colin, Yvonne, Trog): 0151 3361412
FAX: 0151 3361009
- Glover, Adrian**, 10 Lansdown House, Francis Chichester Way, London SW11 5HY
TEL: 020 7720 4117
- Guild of Blades**
WEB: www.guildofblades.com/interactive/1483/www1.html
EM: 1483@guildofblades.com

- Paul Green**, 11 Belgravia Mews, Shaw, Oldham OL2 7TB
TEL: clans@wariorgames.co.uk
EM: clans@wariorgames.co.uk
- Harbinger Enterprises**, 3 Nelson Square, Norton Green, Stockton/Tees, Cleveland TS20 1EH
- Harlequin Games**, 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP
WEB: www.harlequingames.com
EM: pbm@harlequingames.com
TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-6.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only
TEL: (Sam Roads): 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays)
- FAX: 029 2062 5532 any time**
- Haynes/Nic**, Flat 4, Brookfield Court, Victoria Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 4GJ
- Hemsoft Computer Consultants**, 54 Crelow Fields, Stillhans, nr Turo TR3 7RE
TEL: (Paul Hemmings): 01209 860116
- Hill, Adam**, 16 Shawfield Close, Sutton Hill, Telford, Shrops. TF7 4BB
EM: adamhill@cablenet.co.uk
- Hollidale, Adam**, 113 Coronation Rd, Brimington, Chesterfield, Derby S43 1EY
EM: psych-ent@mailcity.com
- Housden, Jonathan**, 23 Amesley Road, Hucknall, Notts NG15 7AD
WEB: www.soccerstadio.com
EM: jonathan.housden@ndworld.com
- Hunky Monkey Games**, 9 South View Terrace, Exeter, Devon EX4 6JF
WEB: www.hunkymonkey.co.uk AND www.sjsystems.co.uk/karadon/
EM: ape@hunkymonkey.co.uk
- FAX / FAX (Tom Fyfe): 01392 681086 (4 - 8pm & weekends)**
- IB Postal Games**, 90 Queen Elizabeth Way, Kirk Hallam, Ilkeston, Derbys DE7 4NT
- In Off the Post**, PO Box 302, Halsstead, Essex CO9 2LA
- Incubus Designs**, POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG
WEB: www.incubusdesigns.co.uk
EM: ingbus@globalnet.co.uk
TEL: 01509 217957
FAX: 01509 558788
- Interesting Times**, 37 Whitehouse Way, Southgate, London, N14 7LX
WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk
EM: startup@interesting-times.co.uk
TEL: 07050 658383
FAX: 07050 658383
- Jade Enterprises**, 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB
EM: jade@jete.co.uk
TEL: 020 83256507
- Jenkins, Brian**
WEB: <http://hijerks.com/engarde/>
EM: engarde@hijerks.com
- Kelem Games**, 7 Claverton, Hanworth, Bracknell RG12 7YN
WEB: www.kelgm-games.com
EM: keltgm-games@hotmail.com
- KJC Games**, FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL
WEB: www.kjcgames.com
EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com
TEL: 01253 866345
- Lancaster, Thomas**, 19 Ferry Road West, Scunthorpe, North Lines DN15 8EA
- Laughing Dog**, 31 Leopold Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7NP
TEL: (Sam Bennett): 01394 274452 (7-10pm weekdays)
- Lindahl, Greg**
WEB: www.pbm.com/~lindahlf/jc-hain.html
EM: info@pbm.com
- Lyakhovskiy, Pavel**
WEB: www.klip.pbem.ru/
EM: klip_game@mail.ru
- Madhouse**, 13 Marchmont Green, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 5BB
WEB: www.madcentral.com
EM: madcentral@aol.com
TEL: 01442 252950 (answerphone)
queries/helpline: 01442 402763 (8pm-10pm Mon-Thurs, all day Sunday)
- Maestro Games**, PO Box 216, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8XA
- McConnell, D. Abilio**, Games, PO Box 150, Beckenham, Kent BR3 5ZD
EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net
- Miles, Richard**, 7 Laytonia Avenue, Heath, Cardiff, CF14 3BQ
EM: richard.miles@hotmail.com
- Mindless Games**, 217a Ilkeston Road, Nottingham NG7 3FX
WEB: www.mindlessworld.net
EM: andy.mindless@virgin.net
TEL: (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30 18.30 weekdays only)
- MMJ Enterprises**
WEB: www.mmj-ent.com/ge/
EM: maiser@mmj-ent.com
- Neom Games**, 19 Moslyn Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 5HL
TEL: (Neil): 0161 4831500
- Ninth Legion**, The 40 Hykeham Road, Lincoln LN6 8AB
EM: glempsal@hotmail.com
- Nova Games**, Bill Heron, 39 Thomsons, Currie, Midlothian, EH14 5EX
WEB: www.novagames.u-net.com/
EM: enquiries@novagames.u-net.com
- Outes, Jason**, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA
TEL: 077 9047 9375 (between 6-9pm weekdays, 9am-8pm weekends)
- Olympic Games**, 6 Sudy Ln, Blunscote, Nottingham NG9 3GS
TEL/FAX: 01305 251451
EM: jason.ootes@virgin.net
- Oly**
EM: 1devote@td42.com
TEL/FAX: (Trevor Deter): 0115 9436197

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MAD

MAE

McC

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MMJ

NEC

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NOV

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OLY

PAG	Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tanworth, Staffs B77 4QQ WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk TEL/FAX: (Kath Barnham): 01827 702051	VIK	FINLAND Oy Penninkilinki Ltd. Hellakentie 5, Fin 65280 Vaasa (Timelapse)
PAR	Parr, Alan, 6 Longfield Gdns, Ting, Herts HP23 4DN	VIS	GERMANY ABAS, Alfred-Bucher-Str. 63, 53115 Bonn (Grand Slam, ABAS-Soccer, Hollywood, Juwelentraub am Alexanderplatz, Aufstieg in Tortuga, Abenteuer im Kaufhaus, Sherlock Holmes Criminal Cabinet, Die Irrfahrt des Odysseus, Der sichere Schlüssel) WEB: http://home.t-online.de/home/abas-spiele/index.htm
LOC	PBM Locomotive WEB: www.mclink.it/com/agonistika/pbm/inglese/frame_ago.htm EM: pbm.locomotive@mclink.it EM: MarkPinder@aol.com TEL: 01472 753430	WAY	Birkel, Peter, Hochriesstr 13, 83043 Bad Aibling (Empire) CSPP, Alfred-Bucher-Str. 63, 53115 Bonn (Ashes of Empire) WEB: http://home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire
PIN	Pinder, Mark, 139 Nelson Way, Lacey Acres, Grimsby, S.Humberside DN34 5UJ EM: MarkPinder@aol.com TEL: 01472 753430	WHS	Dahlhausen, Peter, (World War IV, Adventurer Kings, Godfather) WEB: www.nc-daghupe2@netcoligne.de
PEG	Play-by-Electron Games WEB: www.phlegames.com/eldrich/ EM: moderator@phlegames.com	WIL	Hubmann, Thorsten, 30459 Hannover, email Thubmam@xyhora.de (Mandrager) Jacke, Andreas, Im Wiesengrund 118, 27356 Rothenburg (Dynasty Wars) Jahnke, Gerhard, Theaterstadt 16, 96050 Bamberg (Myra) EM: Gerhard.Jahnke.BA@t-online.de
PFG	Pure Fantasy Games, Portland House, Bolsover Business Park, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 6BH Reality Racing, PO Box 100, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 EM: help@realityracing.com TEL: 01380 81819	WRG	Mueller, Martin (En Garde!): goemoe@goemoe.de Niemann, Jens (WWID): JWA Aht, Illa, c/o Jens Niemann, Brunnenstr. 24, Boblingen 71032 WEB: www.ike.uni-stuttgart.de/~www_jfd/jens/ww2.htm
RCW	Received Wisdom, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP WEB: www.receivewisdom.org EM: beja@binternet.com	WRI	PBM Studio, Strahlerweg 33, 76227 Karlsruhe (Spiral Arm, El Mythico, The Weapon) Quirefel, Alfred-Bucher-Str. 63, 53115 Bonn (Ashes of Empire) Stevens, Peter, Zepfellenstrasse 64, 45883 Gelsenkirchen (Duell, Feudal Lords, Galaxis, Prometheus, Quisur, Quest: PBM & PBeM, Shogun, Surweb, Railway, Ringzauber) WEB: www.stevens.de
RIC	Richardson, Stephen, Guardian Games, 51 Amersham Rise, Apsley, Nottingham NG8 5QN EM: stephen.guardian@freeserve.co.uk	ZEN	Stange, Timmo, Alsteter Kirchgassee 2, 34369 Hofgeismar (Szenario) EM: Szenario@t-online.de
RBY	Reby, Chris, 21 Bowness Avenue, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8NF		STS Strategisch Taktische Simulationen, Nulsenstr 17, 31848 Bad Muenster (Tangrad) Wettach, Wolfgang, Beim Schloss 17, 72074 Tübingen (Myra) Xyhora, J Dreuller & Andr Sankloff, Postfach 900308, 60443 Frankfurt/Main WEB: http://xyhora.de
RZE	Rechorzak, Peter WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm EM: tribenet@netspace.net.au		
SAB	Sabre Games, Mill Farm, West Lydford, Somerset TA11 7DA EM: telhoarn@hotmail.com		
SEA	Seaman, Robin, Houseboat Tamara, Windsor Road, Datchett, Berks S25 9BS Sevensar Games, 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ WEB: www.sark.net/~sark/greensun.html EM: greensun@nickel.globalnet.co.uk		
SHO	Shore, Justin, 2 Langport Road, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset BS23 1YR Silver Dreamer, 174 Charles St, Greshnibee, Darford, Kent DA9 9AJ EM: SilverDreamerPBM@compuserve.com TEL: (Justin Parsler): 01322 387195 (Mon-Fri, 11-6)		GREECE Kaisa, Kalitdromiou 8, 114 72, Athens (Warlords) EM: Kaisa@compilink.gr Sphinx O.E., P.O. Box 25 020, GR - 100 26, Athens (Austerlitz, Godfather, Total Conquest) EM: ireppas@softlab.ece.ntua.gr
GUR	Skidmore, Matthew, Guru Games, 58 New John Street, Halesowen, W. Midlands B62 8HH Smith, Russell, Middleton Cottage, 7 Fennels Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1SL EM: smth_russell@hotmail.com WEB: www.soccerdreams.com TEL: 01305 851900; FAX: 01305 854668		ITALY BAM/DaS Production, via Giusti 15 ab, 50121 Firenze (Quest, Top o' the League) Repetti, Christiano, META srl, via Galilei 19-Gariga, 29100 Pordenano (PC) (United) The PBM Locomotive, 6 Via Pisciace, 00152 Roma (Adventurer Kings, Godfather, Medievo, World War IV) WEB: www.mclink.it/com/agonistika/pbm/cover.htm EM: pbm.locomotive@mclink.it
SOC	Soccer Dreams Ltd, Deer Leap House, WEB: www.soccerdreams.com TEL: 01305 851900; FAX: 01305 854668		NETHERLANDS Pegasus Games, Postbox 33, 5420 AA Gemert, Netherlands (Legends) EM: pegasus-games@planet.nl
SOF	Software Simulations, Georgian House, Trinity St, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UB		NORWAY Arctic Circle Games, Box 6142, N-8018 Morkved (Dark Age, Isle of Crowns, Soccer Stats)
SPE	Spellbinder Games, 51 Abelsban Rd, Cliftonville, Margate, Kent CT9 2BE EM: Chris.spellbinder@binternet.com TEL: (Chris Dempsey): 01843 291558		PORTUGAL Associacao Portuguesa de Jogos Por Correspondencia, R. Diogo de Silves, 142-3E-Tr, 4400 V.N. Guia
SPN	Spencer, Jerry, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY EM: jerry.spencer@liverpool.gov.uk		
SPO	Sporting Dreams, PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB WEB: www.sportingdreams.com TEL: 01332 726376		
SQU	Squibb, Geoff, 108 Teddington Park Rd, Teddington, Middx TW11 8NE EM: crusader@tiscali.co.uk TEL: 020 8287 2592		
STM	State of Mind Games, 37 Balliol Drive, Didcot OX11 9RH WEB: www.stateofmindgames.co.uk/ EM: rob@stateofmindgames.co.uk/ TEL: 01235 211696 TEL: 01705 423449		SOUTH AFRICA D Hamp-Adams, 7 Conistonway, Pinelands, 7405, Cape Town (African Simulation)
STO	Stoker, John, 63 Dunn Close, Easney, Portsmouth PO4 9TX		SPAIN Central de Jocs, C/ Numancia 112-116, 08029 Barcelona (MiddleEarth PBM) WEB: www.centraldejocs.com EM: centjocs@intercom.es
SSL	Summit Soccer League WEB: www.summitsoccer.co.uk/ EM: summitsoccer@nworld.com TBA Games, PO Box 1812, Kilmarnock KA1 1DF EM: thagames@btinternet.com TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 525952; fax 01563 536565		
TBA	Time Patterns, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT WEB: fly.to/timepatterns EM: ken@timepatterns.com TEL/FAX: (Ken Mulholland): 01395 276632 TEL/FAX: 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS WEB: www.timeywm.co.uk EM: enquiries@timeywm.co.uk TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582		SWEDEN Magnus Casserjoe, AEMP, Georg Luckligns v. 22/209, 352 52 Vasjoe (Daemonikum, Fantasy Blitzball League, Orkel, Svartfolk) WEB: www.geocities.com/Area51/Aurora/8479 EM: jpebu06@student.vu.se R Rystrom, Box 294, 731 26 Keeping (Trolls Bottom, Heparchy, Conducting Chaos)
TIT	Timeywm, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS		
TTN	Titan PBM, 10 Green Lane, Rainbow Hill, Worcester WR3 8NY TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582		SWITZERLAND Golser, Thomas, Bascherviesstr, 76, 8196 Wll (Andromeda Connection) Mathias Heer, Wasserkwstr. 42, 8006 Zurich (Diplomacy, Grand Prix, Zueri Connection) Ledergerber, Andl, Harfenbergstrasse 29, 9000 St. Gallen (United - Swissleague) Meng, Roman, Schwarzaekerstr. 30, 8304 Wallseilen (Battles of Europe II, Universum V, WAR & WAR-X 1.2) Mueller & Misch KG, Postfach 288, 4102 Binningen (Gladius et Plium) Schmittler, Peter, Schutzzenstr. 45, 9443 Widnau (Ashes of Empire)
TOU	Touchdown, 17 Acacia Dr, Whitty, Ellesmere Port, Wirral		
TUR	Turner, Daniel, BWA, 8 Lonsdale Terrace, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4AT EM: jdloggers@aol.com TEL: 01229 772762		
ULA	Ulalith Games, 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF EM: christian.morris@virgin.net		
ULT	Ultra Sports WEB: www.ultra-sports.com/ EM: tim@ultra-sports.com		TURKEY M.B.O., Bestekar Sk. 11/15, Besiktas Istanbul 80700 (Futbol 2000, Sultans of Stars)
UKG	Undying King Games, 31 Littlemore Road, Oxford, OX4 3SS WEB: www.ukg.co.uk EM: info@ukg.co.uk		

HOW TO READ THE GALACTIC VIEW TABLES

Process shows if the game is run by computer (C), human (H) or mixed (M). The Duration of the game is shown by O (Open-ended) or F (Finite). GM is the GM's code shown in our listing of UK & Web-based firms. Medium shows whether a game is available via email (e), paper (p) or web-based play (w). Start-up shows how much you will pay to begin playing the game. * indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see moderator for details).

Free Turns - many GMs will give you a number of free turns at the start of the game Turn Fee - how much each turn costs. * means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. S means you need to send an SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage.

Other Fees - the following footnotes apply:(a) more for larger positions or later turns in the game, (b) more for battle reports, (c) more for extended orders/longer reports, (d) more for several possible extras. \$ indicates no credit refunds available.

Flagship Ref. shows the issue of Flagship where you can find the best description so far: a=article, s=Spokesmen Speak, d=dairy. Thus, 4s means 'Spokesmen Speak issue #4'. € indicates a 'Euro-friendly' game: deadlines at least two weeks apart and prices for Continental players not more than 30% above those listed here.

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

The list now shows 241 games. Note that all prices are for the UK and are given in £'s except where noted. Non-UK European rates are usually about 25% higher, and overseas rates can be up to double.

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	FlagRef.
1483 Online	C-O	Fantasy War	GOB	e	Free	No	Free	-	94s
523 Sweet FA	M-O	Sport - Soccer	CAM	p	£7.60 per season	£0.00	-	41a	-
A Day at the Races	M-O	Sport - Racing	DRC	e, p	Free	0	£2.00	(a)	42s
A&D Soccer	C-O	Sport - Soccer	A&D	p	Free	1	£1.50	-	81s
ARPW	H-O	Sport - Wrestling	BOO	p	£1.00	0	£1.00	-	92a
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Fantasy Power	SIL	p	£1.15	0	£4.00	-	-
Absolute Heroes	M-O	Superhero RPG	JAD	p	£1.15	0	£4.50	(b)	91a
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Fantasy War	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	24a, 35a, 72-74d, 88a	-
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Fantasy War	LOC	e	70 euros for a full game	-	-	-	-
Aeroball	M-F	Sport - Fictional	WIG	p	£2.00	1	£1.25	-	62-63a
Agamemnon II	M-F	Fantasy War	KEL	p	£12.00	5	£2.00	-	76a
Alamaze	C-F	Fantasy War	PAG	p	£1.50	0	£3.50	-	71a, 80a
American Civil War Battles	M-F	Historical: Power	AGE	p	£6.40	0	£2.80	-	60s
American War of Ind. Battles	M-F	Historical: Power	AGE	p	£6.40	0	£2.80	-	78s
Ancient Empires	M-F	Historical: Power	OAT	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1 month	58a
Ancient Fantasy Empires	M-F	Fantasy War	OAT	e, p	£8.00	0	£3.25	£1 month	58s
Ancient PBM Soccer	C-O	Sport - Soccer	APE	p	£1.50	0	£3.00 for 2 games	-	35a
Aspects of Might	M-O	Adventure	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	94s
Assyria's End	M-O	Historical: Power	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£5.00	(a)	90a
Austrelitz	C-F	Historical: Power	TBA	e, p	£10.00*	0	£3.00	(a)	34s
Away the Lads	M-F	Sport - Soccer	DRC	e, p	Free	0	£2.40	42s	-
Bakufu	H-F	Fantasy RPG	WRG	p	£36.00 for a whole game	-	-	-	-
Barony of the Rivers	H-O	Fantasy RPG	HIL	p	£10.00	3	£2.50	-	-
Basketball	C-O	Sport - Basketball	CAM	p	£5	0	£3.50	(a)	19a
Battle Plan	C-O	Modern War	FBU	e	Free	0	Free	-	85a
Battle Robots	C-F	Futuristic - Robots	GSF	e	Free	0	£2.95	(a)	86a
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£9.95	3	£2.50	(a)	87a
Beyond Green Sun	M-O	Sci Fi	SEV	e, p	Free	0	£4.00 - £6.00	-	-
Beyond the Stellar Empire	M-O	Sci Fi	KYC	p	Free	1	£2.50 - £6.00	-	22a, 83a
Bledian Diary, A	M-O	Fantasy Tribal	SPE	e, p	£7.50	2	£2.25 - £3.25	\$ 80a, 81-84d	-
British Wrestling Association	H-O	Sport - Wrestling	TUR	p	£7.00	6	£1.00	-	57a, 92a
Centre-Earth	H-O	Fantasy Power	BAR	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Championship Football	C-O	Sport - Soccer	HEM	p	Free	5	£2.00	(d)	41s
Championship League	C-O	Sport - Soccer	CHL	p	Free	0	£1.95	-	53s
Chaos Trail	H-O	Fantasy RPG	WIL	p	£0.50	0	£0.50	(d)	47a, 86a
Chicken Run	H-O	Sport - Motor Racing	FCW	e, p	£5.00	1	£2.00	(c)	30a
Children of the Morning Star	C-O	North American RPG	FEN	p	£10.00	2	£2.00	-	84a
Clares II	M-O	Fantasy Tribal	COE	p	Free	0	£1.50	(d)	70s
Come On You Reds	M-O	Sport - Soccer	CAM	e, p	£1.00	1	£1.00	-	34a, 41a
Company Commander	M-F	Modern War	OAT	e, p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month	-	68a
Conclave	C-F	Fantasy Power	UKG	e, p	£10.00	2	£4.50	-	91s
Conquest of the Stars	C-F	Space	PEG	e	TBA	TBA	TBA	-	-
Covert Operations	C-F	Economic	FBU	e	\$25 per game	0	n/a	-	-
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Fantasy Tribal	HAQ	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	(d)	-
Crisis! The Quest World	M-O	Fantasy Tribal	CRA	p	£9.95	2	£2.50	-	7a
Crisis! The Quest World	C-F	Modern War	TM	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.20*	-	85a
Dark Age II	C-F	Historical: Power	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 3	-	51a
Day at the Races, A"	M-O	Sport - Horse Racing	GLO	p	£2.50	10	£2.50	-	-
Diadochi	C-F	Historical: Power	CYC	p	£5.00	1	£2.50	-	78a, 79d, 81d
Diplomacy	H-F	Historical: Power	TW	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	-
Directive 32	M-F	Sci Fi	COZ	p	£10.00	0	£6.00	-	73s
DungeonWorld	C-O	Fantasy RPG	ULA	e, p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	79a
Eagle	H-F	Adventure	MAD	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	(d) 74a, 77d, 80a, 92-93d	-
EG: Delon	H-F	Historical: War	SAB	p	£10.00	1	£10.00 for 3	-	-
EG: King & Cardinal	H-O	Historical: EGI	CRO	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: LPBS	H-O	Historical: EGI	EVA	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: Orc	H-O	Historical: EGI	ARA	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: Orleans	H-O	Historical: EGI	JEN	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: Slumbers	H-O	Historical: EGI	BRM	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: Sun King	H-O	Historical: EGI	CRU	p	£8.00	2	£2.50	-	67a, 93a
EG: Time of Honor	M-O	Historical: EGI	COP	e, w	Free	0	Free	-	93a
EG: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	Historical: EGI	SPN	p	£5.00	5	£0.80	-	84s, 93a
Einstein's Lot	H-O	Modern RPG	ULA	p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	91a
Eldritch	C-O	Fantasy War	PEG	e	Free	2	£2	-	74s, 91s
Election Year	C-F	Political	FBU	e	\$25 per game	0	-	-	-

Game	Process
Empires of Corinthum	M-O
Endless Time and Space	H-F
English Civil War Battles	M-F
Epoch of Might	H-O
Exile	C-O
Extra Time-Chairman	C-O
Extra Time-original	C-O
Falcon	M-F
Fall of the Roman Empire	M-F
Fallen at the First	M-O
Fantasy Cycling 2001	C-O
Fantasy Soccer	C-O
Fudal Lords	C-F
First Crusade	C-F
Food Chain	C-O
Football Maestro	C-O
Football Predictions	C-O
"For God, King & Country"	H-F
Forgotten Front	C-F
Galactic Conflict	C-F
Galactic Empires	C-F
Galactic Invasion 2	C-F
Gameplan	C-O
Gameplan Baseball	C-O
Gameplan Boxing	C-O
Gameplan: Advanced	C-O
Games Guru	M-F
Gemini Football	H-O
Gobball	C-O
Godfather	C-F
Godfather	C-F
Gorlos	C-O
Grand National	M-O
Gridiron Stats	H-F
Gryphon	H-F
Guardian	M-O
Gunboat Diplomacy	H-F
Heavens Above	C-F
Heroes of Olympus	H-O
Heroic Fantasy	C-O
Hooplman	C-O
Horse Racing	C-O
In Off the Post	H-F
In The House Today	H-F
Iron Kings	C-F
It's a Crime!	C-F
It's in the Net	C-O
JWA Wrestling	M-O
Kickabout	C-O
Kings of Karadon	C-F
Kings of Steel	H-F
KLPJ	C-O
Knights of Christendom	H-F
La Gloire du Roi	M-O
La Ultima Cruzada	H-F
Lands of Elvanna	H-F
League Soccer	M-O
Legend of the Stars	C-F
Legends of Israel	C-O
Lizards	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 24	M-O
Lords of the Earth: 17	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 24	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 32	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 34	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 42	C-F
Lords of the Earth: 92	C-F
Middle Earth PBM	C-F
MMCII	C-O
Mobius I	H-F
Monster Island	C-F
Monsters	C-F
Morris Maximus	C-O
Mundis	H-F
Napoleonic Battles	M-F
Necromancer	C-F
Neutral Zone	C-O
No Holds Barred	C-F
Nuclear Destruction	C-F
Offside Ref!	C-F
Overlord	M-O
"Paloma League, The"	H-F
Panzergruppe II	M-F
Penalty!	M-O
Phantasmach	C-O
Planet Soccer	C-O
Planetary Wrestling Syndicate	H-O

Game	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free	Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	FlagRef.
Pop Turfs	Economic	RCW	e, p	Free	0	1	£0.50	-	91a
Portals & Palaces	Fantasy RPG	HOL	e, p	£5.00	1	£1.30	£1.30	(c)	23s
Postal American Football League	Sport - American Fball	CLE	e, p	£54 a season	0	-	-	-	29a, 88a, 88d, 9d
Premier League	Sport - Soccer	BOU	p	£8.00 per season	0	-	-	-	63s
Primus Inter Pares	Historical: Power	INT	e, p	£10.00	1	£6.00/month	£10.00	57a, 75d, 84a, 88a, 92a	32s
Pro Soccer	Sport - Soccer	OLY	p	Free	1	£1.50	£1.50	(c)	91s
Prometheus	Fantasy Empire	HKM	e, p	£10.00	0	£2.50	£3.50	-	41s
Psychic	Futuristic RPG	COO	e, p	£20.00	1	£3.50	£3.50	-	-
Sport - Soccer	Sport - Soccer	CAM	p	£5.00 per season	-	-	-	-	-
Pub Kikk'n	Sport - Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	5	£1.00	£1.75	(d)	57a
Puma	Sport - Soccer	PGF	p	Free	0	£2.00	£2.00	-	36a, 47a
Pure Fantasy Fbhl	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	0	£2.00	£2.00	-	60a, 90s
Quest Online	Adventure	KJC	w	Free	0	£2.00	£2.00	-	89s
Racequest Grand Prix	Sport - Motor Racing	McG	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	£1.75	-	62s
Reality Racing	Sport - Horse Racing	McG	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	£2.50	(d)	89a
Rebans of Islam	Fantasy World	VIK	e, p	Free	0	£4.00	£4.00	(a)	-
Riddle of the Sands	Fantasy Power	EBU	p	£20.00	10	£2.50	£2.50	(a)	-
Riddler	Sci-Fi	FLU	e	£2.00	3	£4	£4	(a)	-
Royal Alliances	Historical: Power	HAQ	p	£15.00	4	£3.40	£3.40	-	71a
Rugby League Challenge	Sport - Rugby	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.10	£1.10	-	41a
Rugby Stars	Sport - Rugby	McG	p	£5.00	5	£7.00 for 4	£7.00 for 4	-	51a, 85a
Run Chase	Sport - Cricket	SOI	p	£5.00	5	£11.00 for 4	£11.00 for 4	-	-
S/F	Sci Fi	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£1.10	£1.10	-	62s
Saturnalia	Fantasy RPG	WLL	p	£4.00	2	£4.00	£4.00	-	-
Serim Ral	Fantasy War	HAR	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	£4.50	-	50a, 92a
Serim Ral	Fantasy War	INC	p	£5.00	0	£3.50	£3.50	-	50a
Serim Ral	Fantasy War	MIN	p	£5.00	3	£2.00	£2.00	(c)	50a, 78a
Shambhala	Fantasy RPG	WAY	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	£3.00	-	-
Shandunk	Sport - Basketball	McG	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Slapshot	Sport - Ice Hockey	McG	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	£8.00 for 4	-	53s
"S-League, The"	Sport - Motor Racing	SPO	p	£5.00	0	£20.00 for 9 wks	£20.00 for 9 wks	-	90s
Soccer Dreams	Sport - Soccer	SOC	p	Free	1	£1.60	£1.60	-	83s
Soccer Manager	Sport - Soccer	RBV	e, p	£12.50 per season	-	-	-	-	87s, 89a
Soccer Stars	Sport - Soccer	SEA	p	£3.00	2	Free	Free	-	52s
Soccer Stars	Sport - Soccer	HOU	p	£3.00	2	£1.60	£1.60	-	23a
Soccer Stars	Sport - Soccer	OAT	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	£2.00	-	51a, 85a
Soccer Strategy	Sport - Soccer	SOI	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	£8.00 for 4	-	40s
Soccer-Six	Sport - Soccer	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.00	£1.00	-	35a, 41a
Spaceplan	Sci Fi	SOI	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 4	£9.00 for 4	-	57a
Squad Leader	Wargame	SOV	p	Free	0	£1.50	£1.50	-	-
Squad Leader	Wargame	SOV	p	£5.00	3	£2.25	£2.25	-	82s
SSFA	Sport - Soccer	BAY	p	£5.00	0	£15.00/season	£15.00/season	-	40s
Sun Empires IV	Sci Fi	SQU	e, p	£10.00	3	£3.00	£3.00	-	64a, 74-75a
StarQuest	Sci Fi	PAQ	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	£3.00	-	72a, 78a, 91-93d
StarQuest	Sci-Fi	HAQ	e, p	£10	1	£3.50	£3.50	-	-
Starweb	Sci-Fi	FBV	e	£7	0	£4.50	£4.50	(a)	9a, 32-37d
Summit Soccer League	Sport - Soccer	SSL	e	Free	0	£2.25	£2.25	-	-
Takamo	Sci-Fi	ALG	e	£9.99	0	£19.99 / month	£19.99 / month	-	89a, 90a
Tartarus	Robots	FAR	e	Free	0	Free	Free	(a)	75s
Team Balance	Sport - Soccer	BRR	p	39p SAE	0	£2.50	£2.50	-	22a, 34a
Ten to Three	Sport - Soccer	FOS	p	?	0	£4.00	£4.00	-	-
Terran III	Fantasy RPG	BRD	p	Free	0	Free S	Free S	-	-
The War to End All Wars	Fantasy War	GOB	p	Free	0	Free	Free	0	-
Throne of Cofin	Fantasy War	TIN	e, p	TBA	TBA	TBA	TBA	-	-
Timeline	Sci Fi	WRG	e, p	Free	3	£2.00	£2.00	-	46a
TOTI	Sport - Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	5	£1.75	£1.75	(c)	-
Touchdown	Sport - American Fball	TOU	p	£5.00	0	£2.75	£2.75	-	-
Tough At The Top	Sport - Soccer	GBM	p	Free	0	£2.60	£2.60	-	85s
Tribal Kingdom Soccer	Sport - Fictional	DND	p	Free	1	£1.80	£1.80	-	77a
Tribe Net	World	RZE	e	Free	6	£1.80	£1.80	-	86a, 90a
Tribes of Crane	Fantasy Tribal	ZEN	p	£12.00	1	£1.40	£1.40	(c)	37a, 79a
Ultimate Rugby	Sport - Rugby	Ultra Sports	p	Free	No	Free	Free	-	-
Ultimate Test	Sport - Cricket	WIL	p	£7.50	1	£2.50	£2.50	(c)	-
Ultra Cricket	Sport - Cricket	Ultra Sports	p	Free	No	Free	Free	-	91s
Ultra Tennis	Sport - Tennis	HRB	p	£10.00	1	£4.00	£4.00	-	60s
Vampire! 2	Vampire RPG	VIS	e	Free	0	Free	Free	-	90s
Viking Saga	RPG	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£0.70	£0.70	-	-
Vitriol	Fantasy RPG	CMB	p	£10.00	0	£3.00	£3.00	(c)	62s
War of the Dark God	Historical: Power	TIN	e, p	£6.00	2	£3.00	£3.00	-	87a, 89a
War of Wizards	Fantasy War	WWG	e	Free	0	Free	Free	-	-
War of Wonders	Fantasy War	WWG	e	£7	5	£1.40	£1.40	-	-
Warlord	Wargame	KJC	p	£3.00	3	£2.10	£2.10	-	61-62d
Wild World Web	Misc	RCW	e, p	£9.99/year	-	-	-	-	-
Winning Post	Sport - Horse Racing	WLC	p	£25.00	10	£2.50	£2.50	-	58a
World Fictional Wrestling	Sport - Wrestling	BRV	p	Free	0	£2.50	£2.50	-	-
World War I Battles	Historical: Power	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	£3.00	-	78s
World War I	Modern War	PAG	p	£10.00	3	£3.00	£3.00	-	56a, 59-61d, 76a
World War IV	Modern War	LOC	e	Free	0	3 Euro	3 Euro	-	56a, 59-61d, 76a
Worlds Apart	Fantasy RPG	AND	p	£4.00	4	£4.00	£4.00	-	92s
Wotscore	Sport - Soccer	CAM	p	£10.00 per season	-	-	-	-	41a
WOW	Sport - Wrestling	SMI	p	£3.50	0	£3.50	£3.50	-	92a
WW IV Blitz	Modern War	PAG	p	£10.00	5	£2.00	£2.00	-	74s
WW IV H2H	Modern War	PAG	p	£5.00	3	£1.50	£1.50	-	64s
Wyrdworld	Fantasy RPG	FEN	p	£5.00	1	£2.00	£2.00	(c)	32a
Xot	Fantasy RPG	DUN	p	£5.00	2	£1.50	£1.50	-	33a
Xot Solo	Fantasy RPG	DUN	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	£2.50	-	-

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

Zine name	Games
Abysynian Prince, The Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA burgess@world.std.com http://devildom.com.org/DipPouch/Postal/Zines/TIAP/ \$3 or free via web/email Breaking Away, Colonia, Diplomacy, Modern Diplomacy, Nuclear Yuppie Evil Empire Diplomacy	<i>Games</i> Diplomacy & variants, Machiavelli, Sopwith, Hare & Tortoise, Snowball fighting, Psycho S(h)occer
Armistice Day Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6LA stephen@armisticeday.com 80p Diplomacy & variants, Railway Rivals	<i>Games</i> Diplomacy & variants, Railway Rivals
Boris the Spider prbldue@aol.com http://phometown.aol.com/prbldue/boris \$12 for 12 issues	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
Flights of Fancy Philip Honeybone, 11 Norfolk Square, Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 6PG phil@melly98.freeserve.co.uk 60p per issue (inc postage)	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
Strangitude Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ strangitude@lineone.net 60p Diplomacy and variants, Railway Rivals, Speed Circuit, Breaking Away, Awful Green Things, Sopwith, Gunfight, 6Nimmt, Scrabble, Quiz	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
To Win Just Once Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB10 8UP twjo@pevans.co.uk www.pevans.co.uk £2 En Gardel (Les Petites Betes Soyeuses), Railway Rivals, Star Trader, Great White Hunter	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
Underneath the Mango Tree Alex Burdy, 29 Harrier Way, Evelyn Mews, Beckton, London E6 5YP alex@mangozine.com www.mangozine.com £1 Apocalypse, Auction Brag, Breaking Away, Guttenpress, Mish-Mash, Perverse Countdown, Railway Rivals, Rauschmeisser, Sopwith, Sumo, Tutankhamun	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
Variable Pig Jim Reader, Vredelanstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS cj.reader@wanadoo.nl http://fp.sholing.f9.co.uk/Pig.htm Postage only En Gardel!, Railway Rivals & variants, By Popular Demand, Mental, Ellengold, 6 Nimmt!, The Awful Green Things From Outer Space, Backpacks and Blisters, Der Fuhrer II, Preposterous Poetry, Warlock, Desert Island Discs, Bus Boss	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost Games
Psychopath Mike Dean, www.psychozine.co.uk (web publication only) Free	<i>Zine name</i> Contact Email Website Cost

Zine Listings

Who, Me? Cheat?

JACK'I'TH'BOX offers some opinions about this thorny subject...

YES, I'M USING a pen-name for writing this article. This isn't for any sinister reason, or because I'm ashamed of my own opinions. But a pen-name means that I can draw on real cases for my examples, without anyone feeling peeved at being fingered. All you need to know is that I've run some truly excellent PBM games.

I'm also using the pen-name because I know that cheating is a subject where we shouldn't expect to agree with each other. So if you want to pick a bone with me, feel free - just write in to Carol for next issue.

Mixed-up moderators

I was amused by last issue's Tailpiece discussing whether moderators should play in their own games. I've no objection to what Mr Globetrotter said, he's clearly an OK player - but what amused me was that the article was so very much from a player's view-point.

Yeah, players' views count. I suppose. Of course they do! But my point is that moderators don't see games quite the same way as players do. I've run a winnable computer-mod myself and, believe me, the GM doesn't usually have the faintest idea of what's going on overall as the game is being played.

Shocked? You don't believe me? Think about it. If you're a player, you know the details of your own position and how far you're prepared to trust your allies, so your orders are sent off before the deadline, all carefully crafted to follow through some cunning plan. As your moderator, on the other hand, I don't know what you know - I've not brooded over your position or bugged your phone calls - and I'm looking at the game from a different perspective, anyway. What I have to concentrate on is putting in a set of orders from every player as quickly and as accurately as possible. In my office, any tune piped by a single set of orders is drowned out by the ticking of the office clock and the grinding thunder of the whole turn, not to mention my personal stereo. To continue the musical analogy (last time, I promise): as your moderator, I'm singing from a different hymn-sheet!

Game software usually picks up errors, but it doesn't show what's actually happening as the orders go in - that won't emerge until the processed turns. If anything's gone wrong - a bug, a blunder, balderdash - it's my players who'll spot this before I do. My priority is to get the turns sent off to them, so I assume everything's gone smoothly, and don't sit down to read everyone's turn. Life's too short.

I must admit that I haven't played in my own computer-mod since the early playtest days, but I do like to think that I could play it without having an unfair advantage. If I did decide to take up an ordinary player's position, then I would certainly say so - if only to save everyone from the shock horror of seeing my name on the list of players. But it's not likely that I'd know the effects of what everyone else is doing before the turn is processed, and I can avoid any likelihood of this happening - just in case - by entering my own orders first, before I've typed in anyone else's.

It's not in my interests to win, after all - that'd be dead embarrassing! - just to see how the game plays.

Of course, anyone who wants to feel really paranoid should remember that if I want to win my own game by cheating in it, I'll have the sense to choose a pseudonym. (Though maybe not such an obvious one as Jack'i'th'Box!) But why should I bother to do such a sad thing? Basically the relationship between players and GMs has to be one of trust, and I'd expect my players to trust me to play fair.

I remember one or two GMs in the past - John Nicholson, for instance, in his Vorcon Wars - who deliberately set up a Beat-The-GM variant. They weren't going to take an unfair advantage by nobbling the other players. I dunno, does anyone do this nowadays? If not, perhaps it's worth a try?

Keeping it up

In hand-moderated RPGs, it's accepted that GMs run the Non-Player-Characters. It helps, of course, that these are games that can't be won. Obviously, this is the perfect sort of game for the truly power-crazed GM to moderate.

In a winnable game, is the GM justified in continuing a dropout's position, along the lines that the dropout first planned? I'm not sure about this: I think that finite games should have automatic ways to deal with their dropouts. Usually, it's true, the computer ensures that a dropout's position still performs a few standard actions, though this isn't always a very exciting option.

Things get a bit harder in an open-ended game. I've continued dropout positions myself, at times when I thought it mattered. In one case I decided to keep a trading position open, and in another I maintained a noisy focus for rebellion. I kept the original players' game names for this, without revealing that they had become GM-controlled. Was this the right thing to do? A couple of substitute players would have been better, but in practice substitute players aren't usually available. I reckon that I helped the other players by continuing their trading deals, issuing rebellious threats and by holding off a dangerous NPC, while waiting hopefully until somebody who's active could take over the same functions. If I want to do any players down, I'll join some other GM's game.

Just as an aside on dropouts - in my experience it's fairly common to have players set up some elaborate project just before they drop like an out-of-credit stone and around the same time as the other players start replying, grrr. Have other GMs found the same, or is this just me?

In a finite game, one way that a GM could possibly cheat, I suppose, is to cheat his players into paying for more turns by secretly playing obstinate characters who prolong the game. But I'm not sure that this would work well enough. Churning through a long war of attrition will almost certainly discourage everyone from continuing in the game and from playing it again. And no, I've not heard of anyone ever doing this.

Summing up

Disagree with me by all means, but my advice is to trust your moderator before you trust your fellow players. Players are *supposed* to be untrustworthy, but if you can't trust your moderator, who can you trust?

Of course, if you do find him actually playing in the game, it won't hurt to suggest an alliance...

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