

ISSUE 99

Flagship

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

£3.95

Total Conquest

Adventure Games Overview
Godfather
Hattrick
Liberté
Lords of the Earth
Middle Earth PBM
Prometheus
Raceplan
Sports News
Ultima Online
Worlds Apart

plus ...

Board Games, Roleplaying,
Convention Listings,
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Games Galore!
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plus news from
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Report from the Bridge

Sense & Sensitivity

IT'S GOOD to bring you an issue that's crammed with news, review and comments, all inside a terrific cover. We're keen to keep expanding *Flagship's* content and improving our presentation, so we hope you like this issue.

Saying 'news, reviews and comments' reminds me to point out that we cover games in different ways. *Newsdesk* is mostly drawn from the firms' reports, and we've started to include contact details for all the items here. The reviews and other articles that follow report on games in more detail from a player's point of view. There's also our *Rumours from the Front* section with its uncensored players' comments: there are plenty of other places where you'll find opinions, too.

We've kept the extra pages which extend our coverage, so if you think we're overlooking something important or ignoring a good game, do let us know. We're ready to include comments in *Rumours from the Front* for all types of gaming, so send 'em in. I can see the fun in all game-playing, myself, and we hope to reflect this every issue.

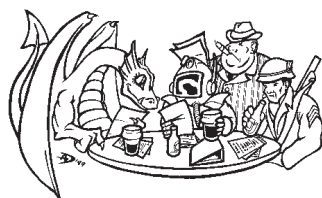
Have you noticed that there's a gap in the market at present, as there's no magazine which reviews games in general? No, not even in the USA! We're sure that continuing to widen *Flagship's* range will please you, as players of all kinds of game, and also draw in more general gamers. Nice, too, to continue to show what witty, sociable and generous people we all are at heart.

Plenty of games are featured here: including new games we've not reviewed before. We welcome Matt Mingus this issue as our new online gaming correspondent. The weight of material means that there's no *Lost Gold of Stronmark*, but be assured: it will return! So, we almost hope, will Mr Scary: our columnist Bob McLain.

One interesting question that's come up in this issue's *Mighty Pen*, is that of taste. I'd better admit that I'm not an especially sensitive person in everyday life - I don't throw bricks, but I often drop them. Over the years I have seen an occasional game turn which I've disliked, but I haven't noticed any sensitive areas while I've been your editor. Perhaps I should be more aware of possible offence, and at least warn readers about this? I'm sure that many of us see a need to draw the line somewhere, so I'll be interested to hear about what limits you think should be maintained. Mind you, I've friends who aren't gamers and who are horrified at the whole concept of wargaming: which seems to miss the point, somehow.

I hope you all had a good summer break: I did. Darker evenings now, and so it's time to be thinking of ... of what? why, of More and Better Gaming ...

Carol



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October / November 2002

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ADVENTURE GAMES



We've an overview of three Adventure Games this issue, and are delighted to be able to add news here of a fourth: **Adventurers Guild** from Entertainment Plus More, Inc. This popular US-run game, which started in 1990, was temporarily suspended for an update. The good news is that it's now relaunched as an all web/email game run to a two-week turnaround. GM Hugh Bayer says that there are still some wrinkles to iron out, but that the game is now running smoothly enough to accept new players.

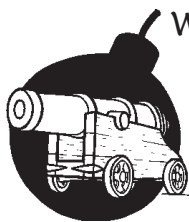
So what's it about? Adventurers Guild is based on the concept of a guild formed by a famous mercenary, to train and house adventurers like himself. The game therefore provides gladiatorial-type combat, detailed character development, and solo or party-based adventuring. It's a new world to explore, with a well-developed game system. Full details from: www.epmgames.com

Madhouse have now started their new, Eastern-flavoured area in **DungeonWorld**, *The Lands of Kyr*. This was specifically designed for newcomers, who won't have to compete with experienced players in Kyr.

The new game-wide plot in **DungeonWorld** has begun. It's called 'Eclipse' and appeared in a big way, with the sudden discovery that the sun has completely failed to rise. Ulp. Naturally enough, the Kingdom of Bereny is in a wild panic. Players at every level who want to be involved in the roleplaying, diplomacy and politics involved as the situation expands are doing so. We'll run more on the strange events as they occur: let's hope it's not too long before some solution is found ...

www.madcentral.com/dungeonworld

Madhouse are inviting *everybody* to come to play their completely free new browser game, **Catacombs**. Built from the same basic code as their acclaimed **Haunted Manor**, Catacombs is more of a traditional monster bash. Yes, it costs nothing at all to play, with turns running daily. High score tables, discussion boards and the usual paraphernalia are all included, so check it out! www.madcentral.com/catacombs



WARGAMES

As you can see from this issue's cover, the new fantasy wargame **Total Conquest** is now up and running as forecast last issue. It's great to be able to welcome a game that's been designed in Europe and that aims to attract an international range of players. We have a playtest review on page eight of this issue:

<http://www.total-conquest.com>

A PBEM fantasy wargame that's new to us is **Murania**, although this may already be familiar to some of our European readers as it's been running since 1998. Murania was originally run only in German, as 'Muranien', but is now available in English. Its moderator Michael Havlis describes it as a complex game, but don't worry: English-speaking mentors are available to help newcomers settle into it. (Check a description of the game in Rumours from the Front.)

The setting is the medieval fantasy world Murania, where up to 50 players control their clans fighting for domination across a big map. Each game has its own victory conditions, as well as its own epic storyline. You have one province for your clan to begin with, and three leaders. You can try to solve numerous quests, fight various creatures for rare artifacts, arm your soldiers, conquer new provinces and much more...

Turns are weekly. There's software to help you write each turn order, and to show you your turn results graphically.

<http://www.pbem.at/murania> redirects to <http://www.pbem.at/muranien>

Currently the game is totally free. That's right, Michael doesn't charge anything! At least, not yet: this may change in the future ...

Another free fantasy wargame we've recently heard of is **King of Kings**. Here, heroic warriors are being sought to liberate Terrania from the dark denizens of the underworld. Overwhelmed by evil monsters, the free people who remain have survived only by sheltering behind the walls of their castles. At last, there's a sign of hope: the gods have allowed great heroes from past ages to be reborn all over Terrania, and the monsters have been temporarily stunned by the return of sunlight. Perhaps freedom can be regained, at last?

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/King_of_Kings/
<http://kok.sepic.org>

Harlequin Games report that their NIC27 game of **Legends** has now just about filled up. All five major factions sport 13-18 members, there's a full Wyldwood council and, ulp, two dozen rogue Dragon Riders are roaming around. Further startups can be accepted for the next month, and the GM will allow first month adventures to be done, even by late starters.

One interesting development is the formation of a Newbies guild of around fifteen players who are in their first game of **Legends**, with an active mailing list full of ideas about how they are going to give the old hands a run for their money. It's good to hear this sort of effort going into a game that presents quite a challenge for inexperienced players but which addicts report to be really worth the effort required to understand it. **Legends** is now only run by email. www.harlequingames.com

Hunky Monkey are filling the waiting list for game 3 of their **Prometheus**, which is reviewed this issue. As a special offer to *Flagship* readers, the first three people to sign up to this game using the enclosed card will receive a full game *free*! Check out their ad on page 33 for further details. We have a review on page 14 of this issue.

www.hunkymonkey.co.uk

Morten Larsen announces that players are being signed up for a new basic game of his fantasy wargame **War of the Dark God**. One of the features of the game is that it's designed for team play. Details of nations already chosen etc are available on the website:

<http://www.pbem.dk/>

Harlequin Games are just starting a new Ratings System for **Middle Earth PBM**. This is made up of four or five points based tables that will help define who is the best, most experienced or most team-orientated player. They are basing the equations on the kind of maths used by the Chess Federation, but suitably amended to take account of the timescales and gaming formats in PBM. The tables will eventually be displayed on the website 'so that everyone can see who is highest rated and who is on the way down...' As you can imagine, this prospect is causing lots of argument and discussion on the Middle Earth mailing list!

Approximately 22 people turned up to the office in Cardiff for a weekend of pizza, socialising and playing two quick games of MEPBM, with 90 minute turnarounds. Harlequin describe the pace as '*frenetic, and brilliant plays were matched at every step by embarrassing errors, none more so than when a sleep-deprived Clint blew up Rhuduar with a misjudged tax hike...*' Despite this unfortunate mistake by one of Harlequin's own moderators, the meeting was such a success that they will be holding the next in four months time, between Christmas and the New Year (the weekend of 27th Dec).

Harlequin also announce that they're making good progress with their Excel-based front end software called Automagic. Version 2002d is about to be released, and incorporates the ability to load in packets of data sent out with turns. This was always a design hope for AM and Harlequin reckon that 'it's fantastic to see it finally realised'.

They are also at the stage of beta testing MEOW, which is written in Java, and which

will be a free utility that works on any platform. MEOW also has the ability to accept data packets, even though it operates in a very different way to Automagic. They hope that one of the two products will appeal to each and every player, making it easier for players to enter their orders correctly, which'll be to everyone's advantage.

The most important of these items of news about Middle Earth PBM, however, is that this issue of *Flagship* sees the full release of the first new scenario for Middle Earth PBM in six years. It's good to hear that *Battle of the Five Armies* has been designed to appeal to the gamer who has never played a PBM game before. It's a short game with simpler rules, and has the appeal of including the Hobbits' most famous battle.

While MEPBM concentrates on the events of J R R Tolkien's '*The Lord of the Rings*', Battle of the Five Armies is set in the world of '*The Hobbit*'. The new game focuses on both the build-up of military forces prior to the battle, as described in this book, and on the battle itself. As in the book, the encroaching hordes of the Dark Servants definitely have the early game advantage, whereas the Free Peoples have long-term staying power, as they wait for the Iron Hill dwarves to make their presence felt.

This game will help new players learn the basic mechanisms of MEPBM in a quick and intense battle, where they will be thrust straight into the action without the need to read a lengthy rulebook. The new module reduces some of the steps needed to learn the game mechanics, has fewer players and lasts for just ten turns - '*plenty for players to get a feel for the game. And, having dipped their toes in the waters of the river Anduin, become hooked.*' Harlequin will be making around 500 packs of BOFA, including a CD, to release in gaming shops for Christmas.

It seems an excellent idea: the scenario has an obvious attraction for people who aren't yet familiar with PBM gaming. We hope that Harlequin's enterprise succeeds in attracting newcomers to the hobby. See the enclosed insert for further details of this scenario.

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

Timewyrm are poised to launch **Feudal Lords: Right of Kings**, a new version of the classic wargame which they'll be postboxing by email to the States. Timewyrm's version of this game will be called *Legacy of Arthur* and will feature specially written encounters and events to give a flavour of Arthurian Britain. Fiefdoms on the mainland of Europe will face the threat of barbarians and the remnants of Roman rule in Gaul. It's a new slant on the game, which is already proving of great interest.

As a special offer to *Flagship* readers, the first two people to sign up to this game using the enclosed card will receive a full game *free*!

www.timewyrm.co.uk

Other versions of Feudal Lords are run by Last World Games,

www.lastworldgames.com

What is Play By Mail?

THE PROCESS is simple. Players send their orders for each turn in the game to a central moderator (or GM), who works out the results and sends them back. This simple process allows hundreds of players to enter game worlds of great depth, to contact each other between turns for discussion and negotiation and to play at a time that suits them.

In most games everybody's orders are processed together for each turn, simultaneously, but the results that are sent back are the individual ones for your own

position. The other players won't know what you're planning unless you choose to tell them, which offers many possibilities for joint and covert action. There are all sorts of games, with all sorts of settings: roleplaying, wargaming, adventuring, empire-building, sports games and plenty more! Some are simple, some are complex, but they will all take skill and planning to play them well.

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

SCI FI GAMES



course...

KJC Games' **Phoenix** is scheduled for launch as we go to press. This game is built on the classic space opera **Beyond the Stellar Empire**, but is so greatly updated it that a new title was necessary! More in due

Nic Best of Sevenstar Games has halved, yes, *halved*, all charges for turns in his space opera **Beyond Green Sun**. He attributes this 'to the low world commodity price for coffee which is one of the major costs in running a PB(E)M game'.

Harlequin Games' **Star Quest** is now only run by email.

Good news about **Supernova**, the highly detailed space opera which was played with great enthusiasm before it closed a while ago. It's back! If you're one of its ex-players, check out the site run by its US designers, Rolling Thunder Games:

supernova@rollingthunder.com

Adventures by Mail report the good news that the number of players in their sci-fi trading game **Smuggler's Run** has just about doubled since they started running it again after a major revamp.

Recent improvements include a change of

colour for the Healthmeter and the Fuel gauge to warn players when these two stats have reached a low status. The old random wormholes are gone, in favour of semi-stable wormholes. This means that players can scan a wormhole and find where it leads; jumping through the hole has an advantage in that this doesn't use fuel, though getting to it will. Further work is planned.

ABM are looking to continue the increase in player numbers for this game, so if interstellar trade appeals to you check their website:

www.adventuresbymail.com

Madhouse's 'pulp space opera', **Destiny**, is now successfully through its beta test, with many players now moving on to commercial play. Madhouse congratulate Mark Cullup, their newest full-time GM, who has now been with them a year and who they reckon is responsible for much of the work that has gone into making Destiny a success. They also thank the high quality most of the over 200 players who took part in the playtest.

Many new features are going in to Destiny, including a complete psionics system and dozens of new 'single character' starfighters to allow the possibility for huge space dogfights involving potentially hundreds of ships. The 'Power Groups' system is also virtually finished, allowing a complex level of interplay between varying player factions to begin to shape the Destiny universe:

www.madcentral.com/destiny

PLAYTESTS

Madhouse have started playtesting their new game **Spiders** (eek!) at a rate of three turns a week and have moved on to looking for playtesters for **Magnitude**. There may still be time for you to take up your playtest position, but you'll need to be quick. The playtest of Magnitude is free and at the end of the test game, playtest positions will have the option to move directly into the full commercial game. Details from:

www.madcentral.com

Note that both these games are available for play as part of Madhouse's new **Adventure Passport** (see ads in this issue for details).

Richard Narain invites playtesters to try out his brand new game, **Deathball**. He describes the game as being 'somewhere between a sports sim and a bloody battle. With four teams on each pitch, the idea is to score a goal with an opposing player's head! Beat up the other teams, attack the ref, even bring on your own streakers! A host of spells adds to the fun of this game.' The setup and turns are free for playtesters. Tell Richard whether you'd would prefer the rules on disc or paper. Contact: Richard Narain, 5 The Mead, Glormead, Goodwyns, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2NG or email

KizamiZuki@aol.com



FIRMS

KJC Games have started an ongoing competition to judge the best of their players' websites. The sites must concentrate on PBM and PBeM games, of course, and not include 'adult' material. Rewards are game credits and publicity among their player base. This seems a bright idea for inspiring some creative web design. More details from the KJC website:

www.kjcgames.com

Productions R Danard has been running PBM games in France since 1992, and now they are offering games in English as well as French. They can be easy to learn (**Hypastia**, **Libertad!**) or more difficult to master (**Empire Stellaire**, **Adventurer Kings** ...).

There's also a new game of **Continental Rails** being set up. This is the game based on building railways across the USA, Canada and Mexico, while competing with 14 other would-be railway magnates.

Details from Productions R.Danard, 1 square Albert Einstein, 91000 Evry, France:
www.prod-danard.com
contact@prod-danard.com

Harlequin Games report an unlikely piece of management blundering, by which they accidentally purchased twenty too many pots of chocolate spread. 'They are of the I-can't-eat-that-its-nutty variety, which means they are going to take months to consume. Various shelves around the office now sport attractive brown pot ornaments.'

Pagoda Games have been on holiday recently, between 23rd September and 8th October, so their deadlines were being extended around this period. They've told all their current players, of course, but if you've written asking about a game startup, don't be surprised if there's been a delay.

Madhouse announce that their 'Passport to Adventure' scheme is set to launch commercially in the next two months. For £10

the Passport will provide its players with the chance to play in as many as five games. This does look an attractive idea, which we'll follow with great interest.

Some tantalising news is the planned return of Madhouse's immensely popular horror roleplaying game, **Night of the Things**. This'll be in a completely different form, however, as a live, online multiplayer adventure game. Looks as if this new form could add to the excitement! Night of the Things is being alpha-tested at the moment, but once it's released, unlimited play in it will be included in the Passport to Adventure subscription.

www.madcentral.com/adventure

Among new Madhouse projects currently under way is Mark Cullup's **Kings Pirate**, which they plan to revive in a computer-moderated form. This historical game of Caribbean sea adventures had a strong following when it ran as a hand-moderated game and Madhouse hope to build on that reputation to make it a major success.

Abnormals, their superhero and supervillain adventure game is proceeding 'slowly and steadily'. They expect it to join **DungeonWorld** and **Destiny** in time, as part of their neXus family of open-ended adventure games.

Martin Burroughs confirms that his long-running football game **The Premier League** is still going, and says that its cost of £8 per season is now to be made to the charity of the player's choice. This seems a neat idea for moderators who don't wish to charge for a game, but would like their players to make some financial commitment to it.

It was sad day for European players when the Italian firm PBM Locomotive closed down, but we're glad to know that **DR Games** are continuing to run Locomotives games, including **Adventurer Kings**, **Godfather**, and **Stars!**

gvdituri@yahoo.com

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dr-games/>

GAMES FOR SALE

Paul Green of Highstreet Internet Ltd, who previously ran **Clans** as Warrior Games, now offers the original code to whoever turns out to be the highest bidder. Paul says that 'It's a bit dated now, first written 1992-ish and requires specific equipment namely a 486 PC and a HP LaserJet Series II printer, but it still works as a PBM game.'

Send bids to bids@warriorgames.co.uk. The sale will take effect before next issue 'no matter how small the highest bid is'.

Spellbinder Games are continuing the re-organisation which has already led them to sell several of their games. GM Chris Dempsey is now looking to sell the rights to **Bledian Diary** and its software. If you're interested, contact Chris by post or at:

Chris.spelbinder@btinternet.com



ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Good news for **En Garde!** fans is that there's new version of this very well-known swashbuckling game on the horizon. **Briny En Garde** is a salt-water variant, where players seek to climb the greasy pole of social and martial advancement. It's based on the epic struggle of the British Navy during the Napoleonic Wars, so players will have to brave the elements as well as the enemy in order to 'hoist their flag' by assuming the rank of rear admiral. If they can.

It's being run by a team that's well-experienced in En Garde! Terry Crook is in charge of the game's website, while 'Red' Hajo Schlosser is the GM, assisted by John Cosgrove. The game is free and email based. If you're interested check the website:

www.brinyengarde.co.uk

Hopeful news for **Saturnalia** players, too. Dark Wolf Games are taking over the Northeast area, doing away with the VI Adventures which the players didn't take too keenly to, and incorporating the VI into the new Northeast. Saturnalia is a long-running, well-loved game, but it's not been easy for new players to find an area which has room for them: this seems a promising development if all goes as planned.

Mark Pinder announces that he's revamped his long-running game **Lands of Elvaria** and now has a new rulebook. He's changed parts of the game to make things more playable and, in consultation with his players, has brought in a few upgrades. This seems to be going down well with his existing players, and Mark now has the time and space to be able to welcome new players.

We postponed the diary that we were running on the game while Mark sorted out problems with his real-world work, but hope to be resuming this soon.

Timewyrm report that the waiting list for **Heroes of Olynthus** is currently empty, so new players are unlikely to have long to wait before they can join the game. Heroes is an historical roleplaying game, where at present you start in the ancient city of Sumer with the chance to explore both Sumer and the lands beyond. Other areas will open in time ...

www.timewyrm.co.uk

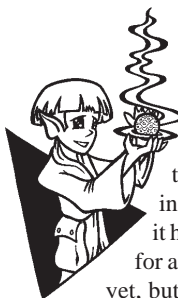
TRIBAL GAMES

There's now a website where you can find a collection of stories based on turn events in **TribeNet**. Interesting stuff that's well worth a look:

<http://www.geocities.com/jarkkosuvinen/Tribenet>

TribeNet has a substantial and international email following, with many players engaging in roleplay to the point of writing stories of the kind found on the above website.

POWER GAMES



Constantine Xanthos reminds us that his historical simulation **Renaissance** is now running again. We used to list the game, which started in 1982, but didn't realise that it had restarted after being closed for a rewrite. We don't have prices

yet, but can tell you that the game is based on noble families in Renaissance Europe. It is an email game nowadays, but not an interactive web game. Check with Constantine for further details:

Cxanthos@bellsouth.net

Meets & Conventions

GAMES GAMES GAMES DAYS: Monthly games days 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@sfcpress.co.uk

Upcoming dates: 12th October, 9th November, 14th December,

OCTOBER

FALLCON 2002: Saturday 12 October, *Entrance Lodge, Wheatley Campus, Oxford Brookes University*. FallCon is a charity event with all profits going to The Disability Trust. Can the city of Sarbreenar ever get the peace it deserves? Even with the defeat of Nemini, many tragedies have occurred in the last month. Admission: £4.50, Concessions: £3.00 (unemployed, disabled, undergraduates & OAPs).

www.sarbreenar.com/news/fallcon02.htm

GAELCON 2002: 26-28 October 2002, Clontarf Castle Hotel, Dublin. Gaelcon is Ireland's largest independent games convention, catering to both long time gamers, and those who are just starting out in the hobby. Spanning three days over the October Bank Holiday Weekend, Gaelcon is non-stop gaming experience designed to pack as many different, varied and above all fun experiences as possible into a short time.

<http://www.irishgamesassociation.com/gaelcon2002/index2.html>

NOVEMBER

EXCALIBUR is a charitable event taking place, this year, on the weekend of 1-3 November 2002 at *Honcombe Manor Holiday Park, Cornwall*. This independent event is being teamed by a group of willing gamers so this basically means more of the money raised will go to charity. This year's charity is: Sargent: Cancer Care for Children. Excaliber now also incorporates **WigCon**, who have joined forces with the guys behind Excaliber to bring you a games convention for the entire South West of England (all others are welcome of course).

www.geocities.com/excaliber_uk2002/

MIDCON: November 22nd-24th 2002, at the Thistle Hotel, Queensway, Birmingham. Will include the UK National Diplomacy Championship as well as plenty of other gaming events. Newcomers welcomed!

Registration is £10. Please make cheques payable to SFC Press. Bookings and further information from: Midcon, SFC Press Ltd, Not Just Stamps, 17 Crendon Street, High Wycombe HP13 6LJ

www.sfcpress.co.uk/Events/Midcon/

Midcon_booking.htm

Re the National Diplomacy Championship itself: Jeremy Tullet, 7 Midland Place, Derby DE1 2RR jeremy.d.tullet@btinternet.com

DRAGONMEET: November 30th in *Kensington Town Hall, London*. A friendly convention for all gamers. Details from:

www.dragonmeet.com

DECEMBER

SETTLERS TOURNAMENT: 1st December 2002, in *Brighton*, run by the Brighton Boardgames Club. Info from:

news@brighton-boardgames.org.uk

HOGMANAY-CON: 2pm December 29th 2002 - 2pm January 2nd 2003 at *16 Blacket Place, Edinburgh EH9 1RL*. Gaming and celebrations. Limited to 40 players, includes a ticket to the street party on New Year's Eve. Charges: just £1 per day for heating. Contact: Tanya Fox at tanyafoxgal@hotmail.com or write to Tanya Fox, Hogmanay-Con, 16 Blacket Place, Edinburgh EH9 1RL.

JANUARY 2003

OXCON 2003: 25th-26th January 2003 at *The Mitre, The High Street, Oxford*. Tournaments include ... The 13th Annual Diplomacy Tournament on Saturday 25th, The 6th Annual Oxford The Settlers of Catan Tournament on Sunday 26th, Lost Cities Tournament on Sunday 26th, Fifteen-To-One on Saturday 25th, Many, many other games played informally over the weekend!

Comprehensive weekend entrance fee, £6. Doors open 10:00am. Open all day for informal gaming. Accommodation is not available directly from Oxcon. However, the organisers are happy for you to contact them for details of local B&B's and hotels. Details from dipsoc@hotmail.com or richard.Huzzey@st-annes.ox.ac.uk

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~diplo/oxcon/index.html>

FEBRUARY 2003

CONCEPTION 2003 5 - 9th February 2003. *Hoburne Naish holiday park, in Highcliffe, near Christchurch, Dorset*. Last year Conception ran over 80 games of tables, and some £2,500 was raised for charity (mainly for The Round Table Children's Wish).

www.wessexgaming.org/

WORLD DIPCON XIII/ARMADA Regatta 2003 at *GenghisCon XXIV* World Diplomacy Championship (14-16 February 2003). Denver, Colorado, USA

Web: *ARMADA's Regatta/WDC 2003 page*
Email Manus Hand: manus@diplom.org

MARCH 2003

TOWERCON VI 21 - 23 March 2003, Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool, Lancashire. An independent games convention with accommodation. 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.

www.towercon.co.uk

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Total Conquest

A Playtester's Report

DREW GILLMORE describes this new PBeM game ...

From the Seasonal Address of Elikarin, the Speaker for the Nykresi Conclave, an Accord of Mystic Elven Houses

'Lords and Ladies of the Nykresi Conclave, it is a Winter of War.

The Theocratic Dwarves of the Kingdom of Sanctuary, long-time enemy of the Mystic Elves of the Nykresi Conclave at long last will fall before the Alliance of Dreadlords. Only two provinces remain under the control of the Sanctuary, and even now the Nykresi Armies led by the renowned hero General Lothandar Raingat prepare to lay siege to the castle walls of Down Province's capital. In the West, Province after Province has fallen to our brethren of belief, if not race, the Conclave of Houses. Though they be human, they are reliable, and offer us a shining example of conviction and might. Sanctuary is doomed, and their lack of action shows that their people know their fate.

In the seasons preparing for this war, we have re-structured our provinces, once again. We have kept an eye towards maximizing the amount of Elite troops we are able to recruit while keeping each of our provinces of a similar size so as not to minimize the holding potential of any one province.

Also in preparation, several of our heroes have been practicing and training. Our armies will benefit from their experience as we assign them to lead the units and companies that make up the army. We have also persuaded two more special individual to our cause, and one of them adds to our already impressive knowledge base and brings new spells to our libraries.

In keeping with our Alliance, we have been trading spells with the Conclave of Houses, and we are reaching an equilibrium. Our Priests and Casters will soon begin researching new spells so that we may all benefit.

Speaking of Alliances, CorvusDei, our Mystic brethren to the east of our borders has joined our cause, their leader signing a treaty with the Dreadlords...in blood. They have joined our cause, though they have long shared it and been at war with those that would dare despoil the land with their presence, the Orcish Barbarian hordes of the North and the Elven betrayers that have joined into an Alliance with them. The Alliance of Dreadlords is complete, and we shall stand against the Hordes of War.'

KINGDOMS and Allies, Enemies and Heroes, Quests, Wonders, Magic and Armies. Conquest.

In these times, it's not difficult to find a venue that offers these to the casual gamer. What sets **Total Conquest** apart from the rest, beside the fact that my friend bugged me for months to join in, is the amount of control. Long before I signed up for a login and password, I knew many of the ins and outs of the game, its weaknesses and what made it desirable for gamers like myself and my friends. Fine detail. It became readily apparent to me that Total Conquest is not a game for the 'casual gamer'. Not to say that it wouldn't be fun for the casual gamer, but to truly milk the potential, one needs to be a little on the obsessive side.

Well, maybe more than a little.

Easy to handle

Total Conquest is a strategic fantasy-based wargame that you play by email. One of the main things that makes Total Conquest a unique PBeM game is the smooth graphical interface that replaces all the number crunching and allows for all of your orders to be input through pointing and clicking and interacting with your kingdom. You have access to manipulations of armies, capable individuals called 'heroes', a dynamic economic system, politics and alliances, and magic and divine powers all through the interface, making order entry pleasant and easy to track, even if the number of orders you can make each turn is limited.

Initial choices

A typical game of Total Conquest would start with you choosing which race your kingdom will be comprised of. The possible races run the typical gamut of fantasy: you've got your Elves, Dwarves, Humans and Orcs. The spin that Total Conquest adds is the six possible cultures that you can choose for your race. Not every race has access to every culture, but this won't cause a lack of options for your fledgling kingdom. Do you choose to run a kingdom of Mystic Elves? Or are Civilized Dwarves more aligned to your preferences? Maybe you want to play the Dark Orcish Hordes. Each race/culture combination opens interesting options, with advantages and disadvantages as well as access to various troop types. And then, after you've decided what your influences are, you get to decide what is really important when starting a kingdom by ranking your king, armies, heroes and provinces in order of priority. Having a strong leader in your king is something nice to have, but at what cost?

So now you've chosen race, culture, and prioritised your kingdom. What now? Now you must put your strategies to test against twenty to thirty other people who have their own ideas on how a kingdom should be run.

The object of the game is to accumulate Victory Points, which are a numeric representation of your reputation, so to speak. Each turn, your actions and their results garner you more points, or a loss of points. Another unique perspective that Total Conquest brings is that each turn all kingdoms lose a small percentage of their Victory Points as deeds of the past are slowly forgotten. Even fantasy people have the 'That was yesterday, what have you done for me today?' attitude, it seems. But you have many options for receiving new Victory Points every turn. You can send your heroes on Quests, which although risky, can earn you Victory Points and specialized items, or gold, and earn your heroes experience. Maybe you would like to take on building a Wonder, which not only benefits your reputation, but depending on which of the nine wonders you attempt can also vastly improve various aspects of your kingdom. From improving your intelligence network, to adding dragons to your armies, to magical excellence or production, the wonders do more than just add to your point total. Of course, you can earn those points at the cost of your neighbour, as nothing gets the blood of the proles pumping faster than a successful military campaign!

Taking thought

Choose your campaigns wisely. In Total Conquest, you don't simply amass a great number of troops and fling them at the nearest border, oh no. First of all, you have to look at what *type* of troops you'd like to be flinging. Even though there are only four possible races to play, there are many more subsets that live in the lands of Total Conquest, all awaiting your king's disposal. There are Ogres, Giants, Halflings, Beastmen, and other sub-races to be drafted and added to your ranks. Every racial set has a

Total Conquest at a glance

Fantasy wargame from Total Conquest. Prices from 1 Euro/turn. Free start-up offer.

support@total-conquest.com

www.total-comquest.com



temples of the various alignments. From Order to Chaos, Law to Anarchy, and the Neutrality between both, these are the buildings where you can store spells so that other heroes in your kingdom can learn them, and the place where they will research to find new spells. Then there are castle walls to add to the defensive capabilities of your armies should you be attacked (god forbid), outposts to see the enemy armies marching in, and finally production sites to increase the leather, lumber, stone, horses, metal and food that your kingdom needs to grow and prosper, and to pay for all these buildings that are so handy to have.

Working together

One of the better things I've found with Total Conquest is the community. What's better than one kingdom bent on world domination? Working with a few other people to cement your legacy, yeah! There are three alliance options, though none of them are available until several turns into the game, and each one allows for a different type of alliance and different options, from sharing of troops to sharing of spells and even one alliance where you appoint one of the allies to control all of a certain aspect, such as a War Lord who controls all the allied troops.

There are also a couple of features available on the site, including an instant messaging system and a forum that has been around for quite a while so that you can keep in contact with your allies, or taunt your enemies.

The total picture

But the greatest joy of Total Conquest is the turn sheet: the fruits of your labor. It gives you news on how your kingdom has grown (or been forcefully reduced) in the past season, and then breaks down each of your provinces for you, giving you an in-depth look at the demographics that make up your kingdom. Then it tells you about your economics: where your money went, and where it came from, and most importantly, how much do I have now? It also gives you a listing of all your heroes, and what they have accomplished, along with reports on any Quests they have been sent on. It gives you maps of your provinces, and campaign maps when you've got an army invading someone. And then there are the Battle Reports, which give a written and analytical account of battles that your kingdom and armies participated in. At first, the flood

of information can be daunting, but it won't be long before you're eagerly awaiting the next turn results, so that you can see first-hand what your decisions have wrought in your kingdom.

few alternative options for troop building, and of course, you've got the option of recruiting the grunts, the regulars, or your race's elite troops. Your first option should always be the elite troops that your race offers, since these are going to be the core of any solid, conquering army. They will have the smallest numbers as far as bodies are concerned, but when it comes to strength, these are any kingdom's bread and butter. Alas, troops need training, and for that you'll need a Warriors Guild.

Provincial progress

Which brings us to Provincial Development. The development of the provinces within your kingdom is crucial. Having Merchant Houses allows for trading and trade caravans that make for a nice supplemental income. You can also build Noble Houses so that your taxation can be regulated, and in those times where the coffers are light you can squeeze the peons just ever so lightly, keeping them from performing a mass exodus out of your province.

A Warriors Guild will allow you to recruit and train the lucky bastards that are going to fight and die for your cause, whether that cause is just, financially based, divine, lunatic, or because you Said So. Of course, beyond these staples to any province development are the libraries and

of information can be daunting, but it won't be long before you're eagerly awaiting the next turn results, so that you can see first-hand what your decisions have wrought in your kingdom.

A gem

There are many things about Total Conquest that I very much enjoy. Total Conquest is multi-faceted, but in the way that a gem of genuine cut is multi-faceted and not in the typical sense of the term. Each facet is a part of the whole, not something that stands alone. Each part adds to the overall brilliance of the work. Each turn decisions will be made that determine the course of your kingdom for many turns to come. The game also compares to a gem because no matter how hard you try, you cannot look at all facets at once. Your decisions must be balanced, because by doing one thing you may be sacrificing something else.

Throughout all of this, there remain a couple of things that need work. My biggest peeve is that I'm not a fan of the limited number of orders per turn. I would much prefer to do all that my resources would allow.

But in the end, the flaws are outweighed by the environment that truly allows for players to control the destiny of a kingdom of their own creation. Do you have the strength?

Lords of the Earth

Campaign 1: An Age of Air & Steam - part 3

MARTIN HELSDON weighs loss and gain ...

WE ARE continuing to follow the fortunes of the Norse Trading Company, Norskrad, in LOTE01. Turn 213 has been published and the strife of this alternate Eighteenth Century continues ...

The merchant house position is introduced by the Modern Age rules, which come into effect when nations reach a particular level of technology. As the game has progressed from 1000 AD, nations have accumulated tech points, mostly through investing gold points (GP), in their universities. The amount invested in a university, plus factors such as its age, the size and tech level of the position result in the university rating. Each turn the current tech points are incremented by the university rating, and slowly, hopefully, you edge forward towards new and interesting abilities.

The anvil of technology

At this time in LOTE01, there is a marked difference between those nations still mired in the renaissance, and those of us at the first stage of industrialisation. The Modern Age adds lots of new toys and possibilities. Tech level affects various other capabilities, such as the maximum government capability (infrastructure and bureaucracy). It also sets a limit on the stats indicating quality ratings (QR) for infantry, warships, siege engineers, cavalry, artillery (introduced at the renaissance level) and now airships and submarines. A quality rating indicates how good a unit of that type is. Whilst in any battle numbers and leadership count, QR can have a major effect when all else is fairly equal. To improve these stats you have to invest GP, the chance of gaining an increase being determined by the investment and your current rating.

Already, in the mid Eighteenth Century, things are looking a lot more like the late Nineteenth Century, at least from a technological and military perspective. In politics the world is still dominated by large imperial powers.

The Wars in Spain...

The Republic of Spain is now the scene of brutal warfare. The Royalists have now joined forces with the communist insurgents of the Students Revolutionary Committee and their so-called Republica Popular. Norskrad has sent large sums to another Catholic nation and in turn had been promised a thousand infantry. The reinforcements never arrived. This was to have tragic consequences in the tumultuous events of the turn.

Anno Domini 1745 - 1746

The years reeled past, afflicting all alike, but old (and now rather gnarled) Johannes continued to spent long, long days in his offices in the Belem district overlooking the enormous harbour of Lisbon and the river Tagus. Accompanied by six burly Friesian riflemen, the Maklarevalde was fond of suddenly appearing in a warehouse or workshop or iron foundry and conducting on-the-spot inspections. He was very pernickety.

Turning a basilisk eye upon the assembled staff of a boiler assembly

shop on the Lagos shipyards, Johannes said: "In these dark days, when all mankind should rally to the defence of their homelands and their freedoms, what do we see? The attempted overthrow of law by rioting mobs and hoodlums inspired by the agents of greed and despair. Norskrad stands as always for the creation of wealth and property by righteous industry and commerce, but not for these servitors of theft and chaos. We endeavour for the health and wealth of our sailors, our clerks, our engineers and for their families. We ply the world to provide trade and profit for our customers and shareholders. We shall not be defeated by these pirates, whether they carry red banners before them, or are clad in the uniforms of corrupt regimes, or plot and scheme in the shadows. Norskrad strives to build a better future for its workforce, its people, and its citizens, and for Spain. We shall not bow down before these predators and pirates."

Fitting action to his words, a commercial arrangement was struck between the Company and the Society of Jesus, allowing the Company to carry trade, mail and other goods to and from Society installations, schools, churches and seminaries. In exchange, Teugen dug deep into the Company coffers and made good a number of very large loans weighing on the Society books. This manoeuvre was met with glad applause in Swedish and English financial circles, for the bold move meant the Catholic banks would not suffer a collapse.

The Old Man's son Malcom - who had taken charge of the city defences during the Royalist raid a year previous - had a narrow escape from death while visiting the jeweller's district of Lisbon. Two army officers - disguised, of course - attempted to strike him down while the merchant was negotiating to purchase a string of Bahrain pearls for his wife. Only the flicker of unexpected movement in a mirror allowed Malcom to leap aside. His Friesians reacted only instants later, as the shop rang with the blast of a pistol, and a bitter duel ensued, wrecking the jewellers and leaving the Royalists dead amid a glitter of diamonds, blood and silver.

The absence of both Largo and Jose had left a narrow window for King Jose and his tiny band of Royalists to slip through Estremadura and into Portugal. Once more Jose attempted to contact his old friends in the city and to rouse them to defend their ancient rights and usages - by letting his army into Lisbon. This time Natasha led the commando into the darkened city - yet again the vigilance of the Norskrad mercenaries upon the walls proved well founded - battle erupted in the wee hours and every alarm bell rang.

But Natasha's assault had carried a water gate on the banks of the Tagus and the Royalists stormed into the city. The Friesians were forced back by the unexpected onslaught and open battle flared in the streets. The city militia rushed to seal off the streets, but Royalist cannon - pushed by their crews - blew the barricades apart. Everything dissolved into a chaos of street-by-street running firefights, battles in houses and courtyards, a great pall of smoke from burning buildings and cordite rising above the city.

Malcom Procure did not lose heart, drawing on an intimate knowledge of the Seven Hills and districts. His men fought hard, yielding little ground, though the Royalists pressed relentlessly. Days passed, then weeks, then a month. Still the two armies strove back and forth in across barrios now reduced to smouldering rubble and the shattered skeletons of houses and buildings.

Jose Cabellero and his Largoista regiments arrived and now the Royalists were trapped between two forces. Malcom launched an assault into the Levren district - the heart of the area controlled by Natasha's

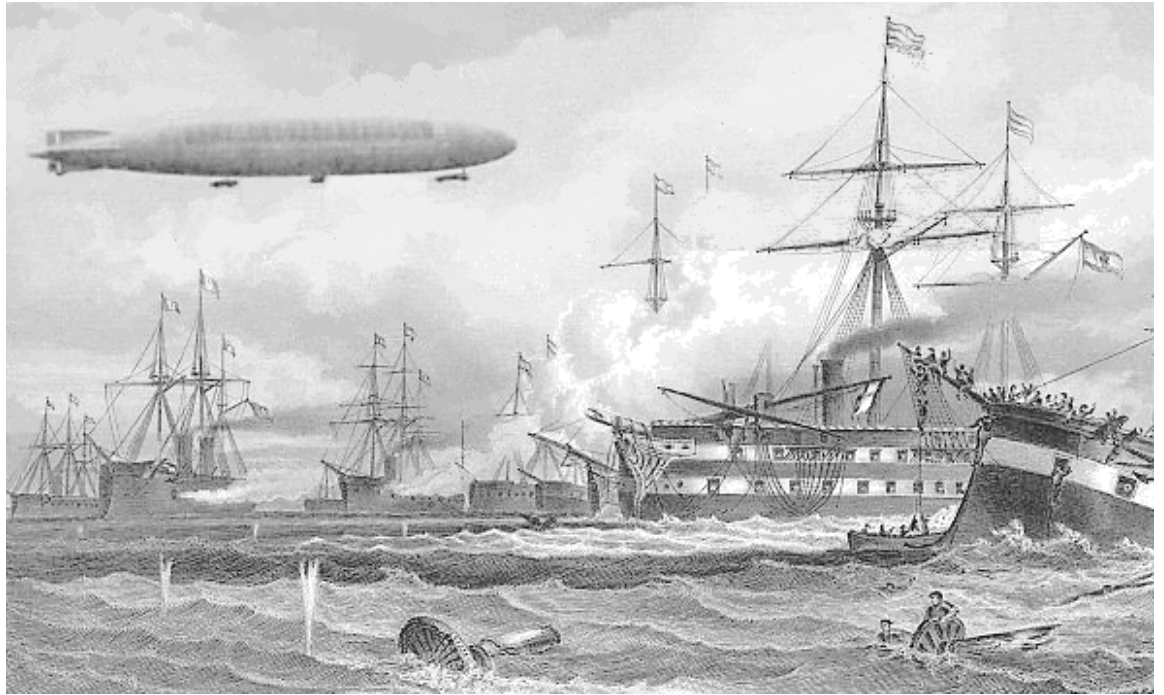
Lords of the Earth at a glance

A commercial PBEM powergame that exists in several separate games covering different historical periods. Contact details:

<http://www.throneworld.com/lords/lot01>

men - and was thrown back with heavy casualties. King Jose, however, was killed in the fighting and Marget Procure badly wounded.

Now outnumbered, Natasha attempted to break out so some of her men might flee and find sanctuary somewhere. There was confusion among between the Largoistas and the Norsk mercenaries - and the Royalists (now reduced to only a handful of men) were able to slip right out of the city. In the countryside, Natasha and her commando vanished like morning dew. Behind them, Lisbon was still burning and entire districts had been smashed to rubble.



I read the newsfax with astonishment. The Republic of Spain had left his capital unguarded again!

There had been no agreement that Norsktrud would garrison the city and my defence had been purely intended as a backup measure. The cost was high: Lisbon ruined, the walls I had expanded around the city destroyed, my new military force nearly halved and one of my 'princes', Marget Procure, dead. This was the hardest loss. In LOTE the Bureaucracy Level of a nation indicates the number of national Leaders and limits the number of Princes. Unlike Leaders, who are assumed to be drawn from the friends and associates of the 'King', Princes are descendants of the royal family. Once lost they are not replaced, unless one of your royal family marries and succeeds in the *Have Children* action. Marget was a character with high stats, and her loss would hamper the Company operations in future.

There was also something surreal about the battle of Lisbon. In the Middle East armies of tens of thousands had clashed to bring down the Daemon Sultan of Georgia; in Lisbon the combatants must have numbered in the hundreds. Fortunately, in addition to placing my Princes on the *Defend* action, I had also used my intel capabilities to defend the city.

Espionage and assassins

The war would continue, but now at least the Republic was gaining the upper hand, and detailed intelligence regarding the SRC had fallen into my hands... Could Norsktrud use this advantage? The espionage capabilities are more of the stats of a LOTE position, divided into a rating for intel operations and assassination. Ordinary intel permits you to defend yourself against hostile covert attacks or perform them yourself. The assassin capabilities allow you to attempt assassinations or kidnappings of other player's leaders, or to defend your own against such heinous acts. Each of these stats has a value, indicating the number of operations you can perform, and additionally a bonus stat, indicating how much effort you put into any operation to gain, hopefully, a bonus in its success. Again, you have to invest GP to improve your capabilities.

With the Royalists broken, only the SRC remained as a threat. With the suspicion that the Golden Dawn were allies to the enemy, now was the time to use my intel to purge elements of the Spanish government... I had also discovered that the SRC was not played by an individual but by a cabal of players mostly running other nations. This immediately made the communists look like an international conspiracy, not least because the players identified were Hussite, the sworn foes of the Catholics. It seemed sensible to protect my single territory from the nearby Poles, as they were part of the conspiracy. And, using the information that I'd gained from a disaffected associate of the SRC cabal, I knew their positions and their strength. An attempt to kidnap their leader failed, but his army was

induced to rebel. Despite a savage defence of Seville, the communists were defeated by the wrath of the Spanish Army. Now only a few strongholds were left to them.

Anno Domini 1747 - 1748

At the behest of the Spanish government, auditors from the Company Accounting Section were sent over to the Largoista ministries to 'look over the books'. Large sums were also transported, under the heaviest possible guard. Contractors were also very busy in Friesland, where the Duchess Lucrea had expressed concern about rumoured bands of 'Polish students and zenballers' who might seek to cause a 'ruckus' in her quiet, peaceful domain. As a result, a string of fortifications was established along the border with Danish Germany. A strong force of mercenaries under Baron von Hausen and several companies of riflemen were dispatched to ease the duchess' fears.

Lisbon, in turn, was the scene of massive activity as more steam-powered cruisers were launched from the Company yards (which were in a constant state of expansion) and fresh airships were commissioned to prowl the skies overhead. Events had pressed the Marklarevalde to militarisation - which did not please the board of directors - but could not be helped.

Company shipping remained active in the war against the SRC - Captain Jorge Delgado commanded a squadron based at Barcelona, operating to enforce a blockade of the Espanan ports of Narbonne and Marseilles.

Around this time, I had my first success in improving one or two of the Norsktrud QRs. The current level indicates how much you need to invest to gain an improvement. If a rating is at six, and you want to increase it to seven, you would have to invest 700 GP to get a fifty percent probability. If you invest a smaller amount, it gains you a lesser chance of success each turn when the GM makes his dice rolls. Other factors such as culture and government type affect your chance of making the step up.

For a merchant house QRs may not seem that important, unless you have to fight a war. However, the Industrial rules allow you to use siege engineers to build things such as shipyards. The siege QR acts as a modifier on this, so having good engineers becomes a priority for any Company wanting to indulge in big industrial complexes.

As more allies rallied to the aid of Spain, the communist revolution flickered and died. There is only one thing worse than a revolution, and that is a failed revolution. Now there was peace in Spain. As if...

To be continued ...

Football, Ice Hockey and Cricket

DAVID BLAIR on the advantages of gaming over real life...

MOST OF YOU will have had your summer break by now - hope it went well for you. Since the last issue England did okay at the World Cup (two wins, two draws and a defeat is about par) but what if Beckham had exercised his right as a captain and pushed men forward as opposed to the ball when they had the advantage over Brazil? What if Henman hadn't bottled it again at Wimbledon when he had almost the whole nation on his side? I see India has just won by an innings and a handful of runs at cricket against England. Nothing changes in our sport does it?

At least in a PBM/PBeM a defeat is not the end of the world: there is always next week and you won't suffer the ignominy of losing your job or being pilloried in the press due to your debatable tactics. It is total immersion in the sport of your choice, and a chance to roleplay, whether as manager or player, or both.

The offerings this time are football, ice hockey and cricket, and once again I am indebted to www.pbmsports.com for their large list of sports offerings. I am near the end of their list though, so do any other GMs wish me to review their games (davidblair@btinternet.com)?

Snapshot offers you the chance to be an ice hockey manager. You take over one of the Stanley Cup hopefuls with real players and guide them through a season of 80 games at a rate of five per turn. Don't be put off if you have little or no knowledge of the sport. The principle of managerial games is just that - get the best out of your squad in whatever sport by training, coaching, placing the players in their best positions and making a few tactical decisions to give your team the edge over the opposition or to nullify any obvious advantage they may possess. With 80 matches to play nobody wins or loses all of them, so the very worst team will still pick up some wins and it can be a start to better things.

You start with 25 players although you need to choose 18 for each match. In addition, each team has some reserves playing in minor leagues that can be promoted as and when required. Each skater has ratings in various skills such as Power, Accuracy, Quickness, Control, Passing, Defense, Checking and Stamina, and the goaltenders are further rated for Reflex, Handling, Durability and Balance. You don't need to be good in every category as only some attributes are needed for certain positions.

In addition to the decisions about your 'regular' lineups, you have to decide who to play when you are in a Power Play situation (when the opposing team has a man in the penalty box and you wish to take advantage of your extra man), in a short handed situation when the scenario is reversed and you are trying to kill time whilst not losing a goal, and also in the four on four situation where both teams have a man in the penalty box and there is a lot more space around. It is also important to rest players - the Stamina rating will bring this point home soon enough.

You need to use your money (called Losing Points) wisely, as you can buy off the free transfer market or trade with other players. Sometimes placing your overpaid Roy Keanes of this world onto the market can work dividends as over time they drop their demands and you can resign them, thus cutting your wage bill. Some LPs can be spent training up players in some of their skills, assuming they have 'potential'. Training up a skill costs a potential, so it is worth while keeping your eye on whether it is worth while spending it or just look to the future and drafting a rookie in with low skills but high potential. You can also develop your stadium to improve attendances, and buy in merchandise and fans to improve your overall income.

The top eight teams (out of 30) go into the playoffs but the remaining teams have a Consolation tournament to look forward to. The season end

brings in the re assessment of players' skills and with each one ageing a year he drops a potential because of it. Better players will demand higher wages and off we go again. Then follows the usual drafting where the teams finishing worst get the first picks at the new talent that has emerged from the Colleges. This has the desired effect of equalising teams over a few seasons, so no need to be downhearted at the sick bunch you inherit. It won't take long to see it vastly improve and overtake the top teams who have aged badly and drafted low due to their previous success.

Each turn brings in around 12 laser-printed pages, including a full roster with current form, injury details, line ups and so on, along with detailed stats for all your players. You will get game reports for all the matches with intricate details so you can see how your winner was scored or how the sixth goal you lost was down to an error by your defenceman. You also receive shortened version (box scores) for every other game that took place that turn - that will total 70 matches alone. Turns are fortnightly and on time - £5 gets you the rules, set up and the first 2 turns. After that fees are £3.25 for 1, £13 for 4, and £28 for 10, or £50 for 20 turns. There are discounts if you play in more than one game.

www.pbmsports.com for more details.

At last a cricket game. Don't tell me there are dozens out there - only one offer came in for a review involving the sport and that from the above stable at Ab Initio. **Run Chase** gives you an opportunity to be a coach of a one-day Cricket side simulating a season, using one of the real County teams. Leagues are split into three sections of six teams, where each team will play a home and away match against the other five sides in their section. Promotion and relegation issues are involved at the end of the season. You need to make realistic decisions about team management and on-field captaincy. In addition to selecting the 11 to start your main game, your second XI will play a reverse fixture against the same opponents ensuring that all but two of your squad of 24 players are in action each turn. The basic abilities of the players are expressed in terms of class from fourth (worst) to first (normally the best) although some can be rated World Class or International. In addition many have 'adds' which apply according to the strategy you are taking. For example a batsman with attacking 'adds' will be more effective if the strategy being employed is an attacking one at the time and so on. Similarly each bowler is given a set of bowling strengths, which will be a combination of pace, bounce, seam, swing, flight, turn, speed and variation. With batsmen having some batting weaknesses, it is easy to see that a correct combination of bowling strengths allied to the pitch conditions will determine the balance between the bat and the ball. If the bowling strengths match the batsmen weaknesses then understandably the run rate drops and the wicket rate rises.

The turn sheet calls for you to set targets for your batsmen to reach by the tenth and every ten overs after that until 50, and how many wickets you will allow to fall to gain these targets. The actual match itself is of 50 overs each and your strategy must account for batting either first or second. In the former scenario you want to push the score along with little risk initially but up the run rate as your lads get comfortable, to eventually be swinging away to obtain as high a total as you can whilst they are still bowling. When the opposition take to the field, they have your figure as a target, and your job will be to set the bowlers in a semblance of order and their abilities to make breakthroughs to force the scoring rate to drop. This in turn will force the batsmen to swing out at every ball in some cases in order to catch up on the desired rate, and should make it easier to

finish them off before they reach their target. That is the theory of it. It works in reverse as when you bowl first you can instruct your bowlers to cruise (play normally), defend the run rate or defend the target, and finally to attack at a point you feel success may come for you. Batsmen can be ordered to cruise, attack the run rate (if it starts to slip below the rate you set at the beginning), attack the target, or slog at which point there is every chance you will pick up some large hits and almost certainly lose the wicket. The idea is to be able to finely balance your squad in its selection, and set your targets for both batsmen and bowlers allowing for their skills and as importantly the skills of your opponents. In a typical game both teams will average around 220 - 280 runs, although in my last turn 4 teams achieved just over 300 and 1 (not mine) gained only 189 runs.

There is a financial side of the game too, as players can be bought in off the free agent market, members can be 'bought' to increase turnover at your matches, along with merchandise to increase total income from which your highly paid crew will have their wages deducted.

Run Chase's game reports are a joy to behold, with over by over full reporting for your two matches and in a turn you will receive up to a dozen pages with player abilities, scorecards from all other matches and sheets with league tables (your second XI are in a league play situation as well).

There is an International version as well, with quite a few modifications but only involves one section of 6 teams albeit each player will have considerably higher skill ratings. To join Run Chase you need to send £5 for the set up, rules and two turns, and you can ask for the County side of your choice. www.pbmsports.com

A new football game is on its way called **Oddball** run by Anthony Reardon on oant@nontri.ku.ac.th. As it is very new and in a test basis at the moment (I have just printed off the rules and setups as I write) why not send him a note requesting more details? It will be a fantasy team and players set up, and more for the thinking man in its execution.

Now for all you PbeM players who like your football but can stomach a fair variety of scores why not log in to www.saeftl.web.za/ and look the **SAEFL** set up? It uses the EFL system of operation which is quite a bit different from the usual Olmec and ESMS systems. It is free but does require commitment, and there is plenty of interaction from the members.

The League comprises of two divisions of 12 fantasy clubs (so within reason you get away with calling your team whatever you like), and works on one fixture per week (occasionally two if you are involved in the last stages of the Cup). Promotion is for the top two clubs in the second division and then playoffs involving those that finished third to sixth to produce the third promotion place. Cup matches are home and away affairs, with away goals counting in the event of teams still level after the two games.

SAEFL uses a differing set of figures to calculate the performances of a team's players. For example NSL is the nominal skills level, which is his basic skills level, whilst an EMP (Effective Match Performance) figure will depend upon the line up and tactics used. Values for Team Ethics (whether he is a Club man through and through or just a passing through player), Morale and Determination are also attached to each player, and the figures can greatly influence the shot count you get or the number you let in.

There are 13 playing positions and 13 formations you can choose from. You must fit the correct number of players into a desired formation, and some have obvious limitations. Get the wrong set up and your shot count will be hard hit and your defence may take more punishment. Sounds complicated? It isn't as the rules are clearly set out and easily read.

In this game there are Grudge 'cards' which can be used for certain crucial matches. Using one gives your overall NSL total a 10% increase for that game. In all games you are expected to play a competitive match

and both divisions have a minimum NSL total each team must have before the match starts. In addition home teams have a 5% addition to their NSLs. Before match resolutions each manager selects a Style and a tactic. These should not be confused as the former (eleven choices in all) will explain what every position in that style will contribute to either defence or attack. For example in a 'Usual balance' a Midfielder will contribute 3/8th of his skill to defending and the remainder to attacking, in an 'All Out Attack' strategy it becomes 1/4 to defence and the rest to attack, and in an 'All out Defence' it changes again to 2/3rd defence and 1/3rd attack. If you attach these differences to all the positions on the field and realise there are eight more styles to choose from you get an idea of the homework you need to do on your squad to get the best out of them. The tactics options number fourteen and the choosing of correct tactics allied to a

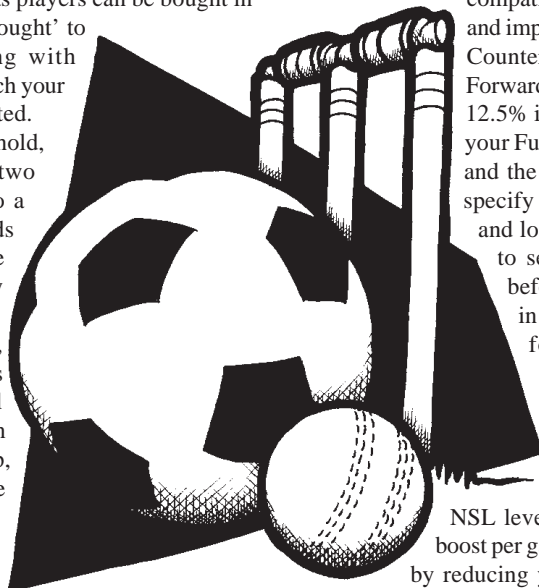
compatible style will push up the EMPs of your players and improve their performances. Typical tactics include Counterpunch where all opponents Strikers, Centre Forwards, Wing Halves and Attacking Midfielders lose 12.5% in attack and as this is in effect a counterattack your Full Backs gain a 25% increase in attacking skills and the Midfield gets a 17.5% boost also. All tactics specify where your squad and the opposition will gain and lose in various parts of the field, and the trick is to see where your strengths and weaknesses lie before choosing what will work best for you. Shots in SAEFL are calculated on the basis of the tactics, formation chosen, the relative skills of the players, home advantage, whether a grudge 'card' is used and the backroom boys you have employed. You get a coach, a physio, and a scout who all bring certain qualities to your side depending upon their skill level. Coaches

NSL levels influence how many of your players get a boost per game and how much of it. The physio contributes by reducing your teams chances of giving away penalties (presumably by training them better to avoid rash tackles), and the scout has three important features. Firstly he gets you a rebate on transfers when you sign players - the higher skilled scout, the higher the rebate, secondly your total of new youth players you get every season depends upon his skill level, and lastly his NSL rating is translated into an EMP bonus for your players each game. All have qualities and avoiding training them up throughout the season will hurt you eventually.

Fatigue comes into the game as well, as a player will lose 2 points (from 30) for every game he plays in but gains one back if he misses a match. Attendances at all matches depend upon results, and are updated weekly. This will create the income from which your players' wages will be deducted. A wage is affected by a few figures, the main one being the NSL rating he possesses. At the end of the season the League pays out awards for everything: Player of the Season, along with the Defender, Midfielder and Attacker of the season. Then there are Rookie of the Year, Gold and Silver boot awards, and the Manager of the Year awards. Lastly there is a Pressman of the year Award for the manager who contributes most to the weekly topics, reviews, and general chit chat involving the League. All awards gain much needed money for the coffers with which to start the new campaign. The last thing is the surprising scores. The computer puts in your line up, formation, strategy, tactics and computes the shots. Scores can be anything from 0-0 to 20-18 (possibly higher, I just haven't seen one, but it must be possible). With the game reports you get a comprehensive note of how your players played, shots achieved and by whom, along with red and yellow cards, penalties etc. There is a downloadable program that gives you your team in all its glory for you use to compute the next turn.

SAEFL can be played simply if you are not into all the workings, but to be effective you would want to delve into the stats and use them to prepare for the following game. Try a visit, there will likely be spaces, to www.saeftl.web.za or contact Peter at peter@daymon.co.za

[If you're a player who knows a game that David should review, by all means get in touch with him.]



Prometheus

More Than Meets the Eye

ALLAN STAGG learns how to build a better empire ...

Prometheus is a civilisation-building game in which you guide your empire from the beginnings of civilisation through to rocket ships, the atom bomb, and the secret of life. The best comparison I can make is with computer games such as *Civilisation*, but with the added attraction of other players competing with you for resources and territory, and without the safety-net of being able to go back to a saved position if it all goes horribly wrong. The game is run by Tom Fyfe at Hunky Monkey, to his usual highly-competent standard. I am in Game 2, which is being run to fortnightly deadlines. This review is being written when the game is 13 turns old, and, for my empire, covers the time from the stone age up to the beginning of the age of exploration.

Our earliest records tell us that in the years between 1600BC and 1400BC our forefathers established our first settlement, Trantor, on the grasslands between the hills and the sea. They already had knowledge of Woodworking, Trade and the Plow, and under the wise leadership of Shaddam IV they quickly sought to acquire knowledge and skill in Medical Science. Construction gangs laboured on the grassland, cultivating it to produce even more food for the hungry populace. A unit of settlers set out to the north, intent on founding a new city, while other military units set out to explore to the north, east and west. The total population stood at about 69,000.

How it works

Before the game begins you are sent the rulebook, and asked to give a name to your empire, your capital city and your ruler. You are also required to select three starting technologies from a list of 12, as you will start the game having already researched these technologies, and you will gain any benefits they bring. On your first turn you will have control of a town, containing population and resources, and you will also control a number of units. You will be able to give orders that will affect the activity of your population in the town, by defining the extent of the town's basic production, by ordering buildings to be built, units to be raised, or research to be undertaken into specific projects. You will also give orders to your individual units, moving them, setting them off to explore, fighting, and in the case of non-military units, developing the land, building roads, carrying goods and founding and settling new cities. You can also give orders for your empire, such as changing your form of government or communicating with other players.

The rulebook is a substantial document, with 52 A4 pages. The cover contains a rather unattractive picture of a modern soldier played by Easter Island statues, which illustrates the scope of the game, but it would not sell many copies in a book store. Thankfully the main text is better presented - cleanly laid out, with good use of fonts and symbols to provide examples and identify important points. The rules are set out in a clear and logical order, with useful annexes at the back. There are often very helpful examples to illustrate how particular rules apply, or how orders should be written. The turnsheet (which can be sent in paper or electronic form) is also set out in a helpful format, giving the position for each of your towns, the results of your orders for your units, details of the things you can currently research and build (and their cost), and a map showing the area of the world that your units have currently explored. It also

contains a list of high-score tables, giving your position in eight key areas, such as Total Population, Military Power, Research, Exploration, etc. The scores from these tables are added together to give you a ranking that helps you judge your position in the game.

The only slight criticism I have is that the text has obviously been translated from the original German, and the humour is sometimes a little juvenile and intrusive. There are parts of the text which appear to have been written by a German teenager who does not get out much, and translated by his younger brother, who has started English as a foreign language. This is probably terribly unfair on the people who produced the rulebook, but here is an example from the information blurb for ship-building.

Required to build your very first swimming units (like Viking Ships) to sail the stormy seas. Remember, dimwits, that your seaport towns should be NEXT TO WATER and that you'll need tons of wood for construction.

This is not a fatal flaw, but it detracts from what is otherwise a very well-presented game. Hunky Monkey are aware of this, and have announced that work has commenced on re-writing the information blurbs.

Early days

By 600BC our population had grown to 135,000 people. Most lived in Trantor, now a thriving city which boasted schools, a military hospital and a sick-house. The hamlet of Helliconia, built to the north of Trantor, was also thriving. Already our scientists and wise men had researched such areas of knowledge as Medical Science, Bronze and Script, aided by the Research bonus from our schools. Our units had discovered the Northern ocean, and had explored for great distances along the coast to the west and east of Trantor. Much of the grassland surrounding Trantor was now cultivated land, and the city recruited an additional construction gang to send to an area to the north where it had been decided to found our third city.

Economic considerations

The growth of your empire is fuelled by the growth of your economy, which is itself fuelled by the growth of your population. At the start of the game it takes 12 Men (12,000 population) to operate a square. Each square will produce between 1 and 4 food, depending on the terrain, and 1 food will feed 5 men. Squares producing only 2 Food will not feed the men working them, but they may also produce other resources such as Wood and Stone. If you have surplus food at the end of the turn, some of this food will help your population to grow. Each additional unit of food will increase your population by about 3,000. If you do not have sufficient food to feed your population, each shortfall of 1 food will cause your population to decrease by the same amount.

You will usually have men left over after operating your preferred number of squares, and these can be used to build structures and buildings, form specialist units, or conduct research. Wood and/or Stone may also be needed as part of the building cost of the building, unit or structure, and these units, buildings and structures will probably consume Food or Manpower in upkeep each turn. There is a fine balancing act in managing growth efficiently. If you build too much too soon, you will not have enough food to feed your population and pay for your upkeep. You can build a strong army - but be sure you have enough food to feed them, or they will desert. And buildings and structures will crumble if you do not have the manpower to maintain them. As the game progresses, research will enable your population to work more efficiently, and you will be able to produce and use more resources - Iron, Oil, Industrial Goods and Uranium will come later in the game.

Prometheus at a glance

Winnable civilisation-building game from Hunky Monkey. Startup is £10 with further turns at £2.50. Playable by post or email (by PDF or HTML graphical front end). Special offer open to Flagship readers.

Vital research

Research lies at the heart of this game, as it is the means by which your empire progresses. Initially research is carried out by your people - those you have left over after operating squares, paying upkeep and building units etc will automatically research the current project you have given the highest priority to. It is possible to assign different priorities to different building and research projects, and projects with equal priority are dealt with on a First In First Out basis. (Allan's tip of the day: It is always a good idea to assign one of your less important research projects with a low priority, to soak up any additional manpower that may have come your way through random events or incorrect orders).

There are 12 basic techs, from which you choose three to start the game with. I chose the default of Woodworking, Plow and Trade, which provides a good balanced start, but I can see that other choices could be more appropriate for those who wish to pursue a different strategy. On completion of your research into a tech, you may be able to build new units, give new orders, or research more advanced techs. New techs become more expensive as you advance in the game - the starting techs cost 12M each, second and third generation techs are costing between 180 and 250M, and deep into the game they may cost up to 10000M.

You are unlikely to be able to undertake all necessary Research from your excess Manpower, but help is at hand. At the start of the game you can build Schools, which will contribute 1M per turn towards Research. Further into the game, you can build Libraries, Universities, Research Institutes etc which give much greater Research bonuses. Research lies at the heart of this game, and to my mind could lead to a sort of 'Arms-Race' mentality. A player may have researched a superb offensive unit, but he knows that he may only have two or three turns before other players have also researched that unit or, even worse, researched an even better unit. I have been aggressively pursuing research from the start of the game, partly because I felt that it would give me the best insight into the game for the purposes of this review, and partly because I am not really an aggressive player, much more content with progress rather than destruction.

Hopeful growth

By 150AD our Empire's population stood at 276,000, in three main settlements. Trantos was probably the most advanced city in the world, with fine Libraries, Schools, Military Hospitals and even a Sick House, and large stocks of Wood and Stone. Helliconia continued to grow quickly, and had its own school and medical hospital. Pern, our settlement in the wilderness, was also well established. We continued to concentrate heavily on Research, and only two of the original technologies remained to be discovered. Our explorers now ranged far and wide, and had encountered units from neighbouring empires to our East and West. Construction Gangs continued to cultivate the land, and had started to build roads to connect the cities of our empire. There were warning signs - Trantor was by now operating all but two of the possible land squares, and might soon be in a position where it could not feed all its population. To continue expanding, the Empire had to build more settlements, further afield, and would also need to explore the Southern Ocean. For that, we needed to build a navy.

What to do

There are three basic classes of things that you can build - units, buildings and structures. Units are usually drawn from your population in a town, and form the civil and military forces that will carry out your orders. You start the game with seven units - four basic military types, two Construction Gangs and a Settler Unit. These initial units cost you nothing, future units that you build will cost you resources to build them and,



usually, food to maintain them each turn. They start off assigned to the city in which they were built, and the unit's costs are paid by that city. Units have values for attack, defence, movement and sight - the distance they can see into surrounding squares. They may also be able to carry out certain orders - Construction gangs can Cultivate squares, Construct Roads, Deforest Squares etc. Military units may also be able to carry out certain special orders - Archers can undertake ranged combat by using the Fire order. Ships can embark or disembark other units. Through successful research you will be able to build more powerful (and expensive) units, which again may give you access to certain special orders.

Buildings are built in towns, and give economic or other benefits to that town. Schools give a research bonus to a town, hospitals give medical coverage to some of the population, and provide for a limited population growth each turn. Other buildings are necessary for your progression through the game - Barracks enable better units to be raised, while a Palace is necessary for an empire to embrace Monarchy. Buildings tend to be more expensive, and have a higher maintenance cost - Universities cost 4 Manpower in upkeep each turn, but contribute 15 manpower each turn to Research.

Structures, eg mines and storage depots, are built outside of towns,

usually by a construction gang. Their construction cost and maintenance is paid by the town controlling the unit which built the structure. Mines are built on hill and mountain squares where a construction gang has found a deposit of ore, and will mine an amount of ore which will diminish each turn. If the mine is in a square operated by a town, it will automatically deliver its output to the town. If it is in an uncontrolled square it will store the ore until a special unit - eg a Caravan - can collect it and deliver it to a town.

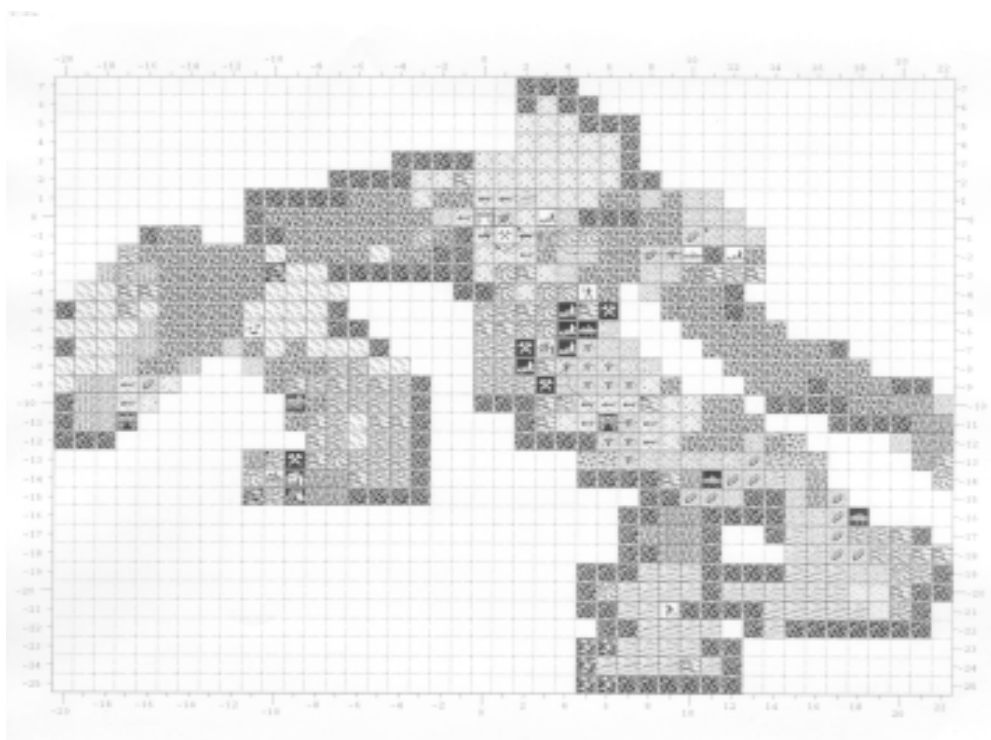
Timing matters

Each game-turn is divided into 100 rounds, and certain events will happen at a specific round each turn. For example, Towns operate squares and receive goods at round 30 each turn. Most actions last for a certain duration - building a structure lasts 100 rounds, cultivating soil lasts for 80 rounds. Units' movement ability is expressed as the number of rounds that it takes the unit to move 1 basic square (certain types of terrain may multiply this number) - a unit with a movement factor of 15 moves at half the speed of a unit with a movement factor of 7, so it is recommended that you send speedy Caravans to explore, rather than slower Construction Gangs. (*Explore* is a very useful command which sends a unit heading in a certain direction until it is blocked by sea, impassable terrain, or hostile units.

If a unit has not completed an action by the end of the turn it will resume the action at the beginning of next turn, and will continue with its existing orders until they have been completed, or they are cancelled. This leads to one of the more complex parts of this game - the timing of your orders, especially when two or more units are interacting. It is possible to order a unit to move to a port or a coastal square, to rendezvous with a ship. The ship could be ordered to move to the square, wait for the unit to embark, then sail to a specified location. The unit would be ordered to wait for a number of turns, or until the location is reached, and then disembark, and then set off exploring in a given direction. The ship would wait until the unit had disembarked, and then sail off on another task. All of this can be accomplished with two lines of orders - one for each unit - as long as you understand the significance of the timing of each order. The timing of orders within the turn can also lead to some smart gameplay, examples of which are given in the book. For instance, if you make an attack early enough in the turn, you will not have to pay the upkeep cost of your casualties. You are limited to the number of orders you can give each turn, and the length of those orders - a useful mechanism to handicap players with large positions.

Conclusions

Prometheus is a game of great depth and subtlety, and of vast scope. It is also a lot of fun. This is by no means a comprehensive review - in some areas of the game I have barely scratched the surface, and I have not interacted much with my neighbours in game terms (alliances or hostilities). But the main impression I have of the game is that it is a game of discovery and progress. There are many good points to the game



- the well-presented turn sheets and rule book, a system that encourages you to think about how to use your orders most efficiently, and high-score tables that can be used to try to determine what strategies your fellow players have adopted. The ability to order ahead is invaluable - I missed one turn, but did not suffer too much as my units continued to carry out their programmed tasks. The economic side of the game presents some interesting and difficult choices, as you constantly have to balance growth against resources. The few negative thoughts I have about the game are trivial. I have mentioned above the dodgy text (which is being re-written) and the ugly cover to the rule book. I am also slightly irritated by the game's adhering to the BC-AD timeline, when the world does not appear to be Earth, and we are not rewriting history. Still, I suppose it is there as a frame of reference - if I have discovered the steam engine by 1400AD, I must be doing okay! This is a very minor niggle - I love the look and feel of the game, and I am taking a close personal interest in the development of my empire.

I would recommend Prometheus to anyone who likes a game where they are doing more now than they were doing five turns ago, and expect to have even more choices available to them in five turns time. After all, who could resist the chance to build their own empire?

These may be the Dark Ages, but the outlook is bright. Trantor, my capital city, continues to provide a beacon of light with its schools, libraries, universities and palace the envy of the whole world. My second city, Helliconia, continues to grow at an unbelievable rate, and is almost as large as Trantor. Pern is now well established, and contributes to the greater good, in resources, units and research. Using one of my galleys, settlers have successfully founded Triton at a location along the coast. And a fifth settlement, Pell, has been founded in an area of grassy plains. My construction workers are busy developing ground, and building roads to link up my cities, and stocks of newly-mined ore have started to arrive. Exciting news has arrived from one of my galleys, which has reported discovering a new land beyond the Southern Ocean. At home I am looking to build an Artisans Guild, which should help my production. I also feel that the time is right to replace the old, outdated despotic system of government, and introduce Monarchy - a move sure to be welcomed by my 500,000 subjects.

Oh yes, it's good to be, it's good to be The King ...

	Rating at	Squares	Processing	Supply	Costs (Rel. Stock)	SP/SC	Project	Item
Manpower	82	-55		-13	-13	9.13	Logistics	28
Food		15		-15		5.13	Architecture	1.38
Wood	74	8				8.0		
Stone	125	17		-3	140			
Ore	72	10		-10	72			
Crude Oil								
Subsidiary goods								
Electricity								
Plastics								
Metals								

1441 Inhabitants (1,000%)
Food needed: 14
Hospital Coverage: 150%
Assigned units: 12
In Operation: 6 Squares
B. Power: 8 of 8

Arasdon has Barracks, City Wall, a library, a Military Hospital, a Palace, three Schools and three Sick-Women.



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Steve Tierney's Retroscope

'A Licence To Print Money'

ONCE UPON a time, in a galaxy far, far away, there lived a small family of leprechauns. They weren't noisy fellows, being generally more disposed to quiet contemplation of life, the universe, pots of gold and (ahem) everything. Despite their general wish to simply be left alone, a dapper chap in an armani suit turned up at their door one day with a contract in his hand. 'Sign on the dotted line, I'm going to make you all stars.' The leprechauns weren't at all sure they liked his ideas; which consisted of loading them up with plasma cannons, spiky armour and an uzi 9mm or two and calling them 'Warachauns'. Nonetheless, the musty smell of more gold lured them in and they promptly sold their souls.

First, they took everything he owned...

A licensed intellectual property is a name, theme or setting which has been used successfully elsewhere, albeit in a movie, novel, comic or whatever, which a third-party company buys the rights to use for a period, usually for a related product. You've all seen the **Spiderman** movie, right? That's a licence of the **Marvel Comics** character being used by filmmakers to rake in the bucks. An **007** action figure, **Star Wars Jedi** toothbrush, or a **Shrek** adjustable screwdriver, this stuff knows no shame.

Licences in gaming are as common as promises at a **Diplomacy** convention. (Although perhaps not as common as broken promises at a **Diplomacy** convention, but then what is?) There are, essentially, three reasons why a company would want this sort of licence. (a) They think they can make a bundle of cash from fans of the original name or theme, by cashing in on its popularity. (b) They love the original name or theme and want to be a part of it, introducing their own ideas and expertise. (c) They are not imaginative enough to make their own intellectual property. It doesn't take much clarity to see which of those three is the preferable reason, nor much imagination to work out which are more common.

Then, they killed his family...

As usual, I'm taking time getting to the point. And that is, how many times have licences been successful in turn-based gaming? Think you need two hands to count that one? I doubt it. In fact, I can only think of a single instance of what I would consider genuine success. Take a bow, **Middle Earth**. Before that there was the disastrous **TSR AD&D** licence by an American company. **Centurion**, from **Pagoda**, which was actually a cool game but didn't ever really take off to the level it probably deserved. Another Yank game, **Hyborian War**, is based in the world of Conan (and how they got permission for that is one of the great mysteries of PBM). That one's still running, but it has hardly ever set the world on fire with its commercial success. There are probably plenty more too, which sounded like great deals at the time, but never emerged to actually pull off a workable game for any length of time.

Reverse Licensing is even more common, at the announcement level at least. This is where a PBM firm desperately tries to convince the world that their game is so interesting that they are turning it into an RPG, a board game, a computer game, a collectable **Pog** or a selection of cut glass chihuahuas to put by your door. Long-time Flagshippers, I ask you... how many times have you heard that Joe Bloggs, of **MegaPBM Enterprises**, is now launching his 'successful' hand-moderated RPG, the World of Loohaha, as a table-RPG system with six modular CD-based add-ons, a GM screen and a carbonated refreshing canned drink?

You've got to wonder why they bother? I've looked into licensing. It's boring. It's expensive. It involves reams of contracts in which you promise royalties until the End Of Time, guarantee that you will still be earning them money when the universe stops expanding and begins to collapse back in upon itself, or that your great, great grandchildren nineteen times removed will be doing so, no matter what form they may have evolved into. Half the problem is that all the licences worth having

in turn-based gaming are owned either by big firms, or wannabee big firms. They don't 'get' our hobby. They don't understand that we don't make huge sums, but we are worth a lot in advertising and word-of-mouth (maybe it's me that doesn't get their business, and the fact that our combined tiny net wealth wouldn't pay for the design of one new Half-Life level). Perhaps they've licensed their games to too many MegaPBM Enterprises in the past and don't plan to waste their time again?

Now... he's out for revenge

We (by which I refer to my own firm, **Madhouse**, please excuse the reference) had negotiations with the **Warhammer** folk and were told in no uncertain terms that unless we were offering six figure initial royalties they weren't interested, but that if we were making those sort of offers (sounds of hands rubbing and moneybags jingling) they were ready to roll and could we send a sample of our blood for analysis (kidding, but barely.) I remember wondering if I was allowed to use fractions to make that really big number and how much leeway there was with the decimal point. I know **KJC** had a similar deal with **Warhammer**. I couldn't tell you what caused the much-promised game to disappear eventually, I rather suspect it might be the same troubles we had with them. With a licence like that it wouldn't be difficult to bring lots of kids into the hobby, and I'm sure **Quest** could have been easily morphed into a Warhammer adventure game. It's morphed a fair few times now successfully, after all. A previous deal I had with **TSR**, just before they were bought by **Wizards of the Coast/Hasbro** came with a 60-page contract to sign. **Gurps**, **Champions**, even **Fudge** for gawd sakes, have never proved any better.

What's worse than the lack of vision and general greediness of huge corporations? The desperate pretence of tiny designers to be something they are, quite obviously, not. Last year, at **Dragoncon**, I chatted with a few RPG designers there and was stunned by the level of arrogance displayed. These fledgling RPG systems are a labour of love. Their designers and producers are usually small outfits who have invested quite a sum trying to get their dream on the market. A partnership with a reliable PBM firm would do any one of them good, giving them much-needed exposure and possibly helping them avoid that great black pit full of books that is the roleplaying graveyard. Do they see that? Are they savvy enough to realise that exposure to a couple of thousand gamers would be a valuable boost in these early years? Nope. Up goes the nose. 'Play-By-Mail? Pah! We design real games.' Give me strength. Most of us PBM GMs who are still around were running commercial games while these 'icons of imagination' were still having their heads flushed in high school.

...When you've got nothing to lose...

If you are running a PBM firm, thinking about running a PBM firm, or engaged to the brother of somebody who runs a PBM firm, take some advice from me. Forget licensing. Don't bother with the latest instalment of **Zombie Marauders**, the recent **Eddie Davings** book (which is almost certainly exactly the same as the last seven books by **Eddie Davings**) or the fifteenth prequel in that galaxy far far away. Avoid dealings with companies that buy companies that buy companies, systems that regularly release new editions that are significantly worse than the edition before, or cartoon characters who appear on the side of plastic disposable nappy bags and vacuum-formed lunch-boxes. You've got your own brains, your own imagination and creativity. Don't throw money at people who won't even notice your paltry contribution next to their mountains of gold coins. It's a crutch you have no need for. Throw it away and have a little faith!

The Small Facts

Coming soon... Warachauns V : Legacy Of A Forgotten Sun

Now they *really* want to shoot things and cause immense explosions. From the producers of Warachauns III and the Director of Warachauns IV. All Rights Reserved.

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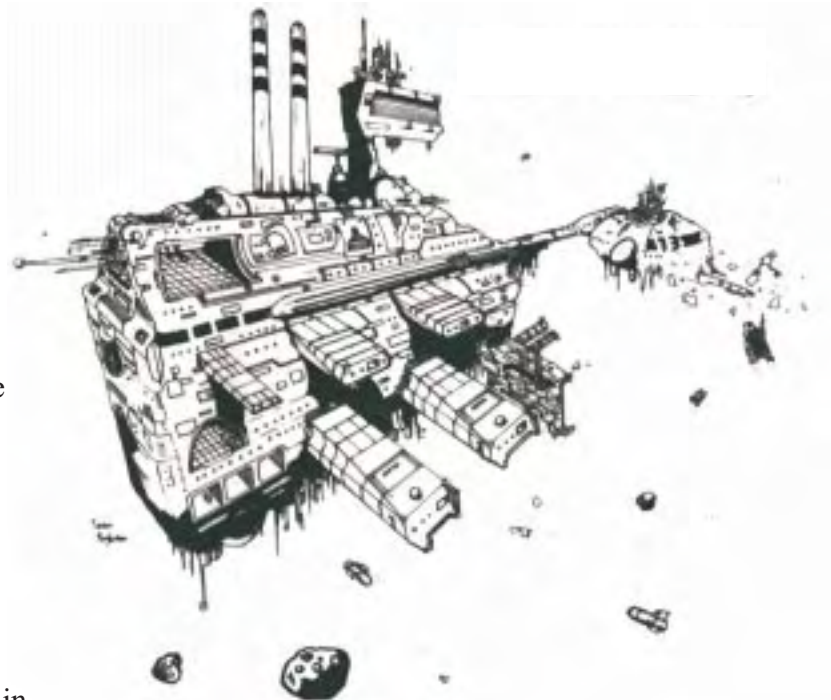
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Online Gaming's Honor Roll

Our new online columnist, MATT MINGUS, with his first impressions of ten online games ...

THERE ARE many, many online games to choose from these days. But which ones are the best (and worst) to play? What's free? What's fun? Which game has the kind of game-play I want? Well, I searched for some of the most popular online games (according to the Multi Player Online Gaming Directory - www.mpogd.com) and wrote up an article of each one of them. Over the next few months, I'll be reviewing each of the following games very thoroughly. In the end, you'll know which games are worth your time and which games aren't worth anything.

1 - Taenaria Derivia Zallus Kitara

<http://www.tdzk.net>

With thousands of players and tons of support, TDZK is obviously a very popular game. This game is like many other turn-based space strategy games. The point is basically to industrialize your planet, create a product, and trade with the hundreds of other planets in the universe.

Is it free? Yes. Do you need software? No. TDZK is completely online. No software or money needed.

First Impression: Good game. Looks like it has a lot of bandwidth and community.

2 - Ferion

<http://portal.ferion.com>

Another space strategy game. Ferion is also turn-based but has a lot more options than TDZK. This text-based game allows you to build up fleets, design your own ship, discover technologies, and lots more that I'll cover when I write the review. Like most of the games in this list, Ferion is devoted to the internet. You don't need any software to play this game.

Is it free? Yes. However, you can purchase a premium account which gives you advantages others don't have. Do you need software? No.

First Impression: Very graphical with many international players. Looks like a good game.

3 - Neveron

<http://www.neveron.com>

Once again, space strategy. Neveron is a pretty standard real-time (running on an internal clock, not turns) game. The only difference between it and the hundreds of games like it is the fact that it focuses on diplomatic development instead of barbaric and brutal space war. Neveron is also exclusively online; however, you must download a plug-in for your browser to play.

Is it free? Yes. Do you need software? Just the plug-in.

First Impression: Just another run of the mill game. Doesn't seem to have too much to offer in the way of exciting game play. We'll see ...

4 - World War II Online

<http://www.wwiionline.com>

Look! It has nothing to do with space! Although this web game does need some software to be played (\$19.99 US) and you must pay a monthly subscription fee (\$9.99 US), it looks well worth it. WWII Online offers amazing graphics and game play that only the best can. I guarantee that this'll be a game review you won't want to miss!

Is it free? No. \$19.99 for software and a \$9.99 monthly subscription fee. Do you need software? Yes.

First Impression: Amazing. This game looks to be a great investment.

5 - Circle of Darkness: Arena

<http://arena.idiotworld.com>

This game offers a more medieval background of game play. Apparently, the world has crumbled in war and few cities are left. Almost all humanity has been wiped out. You need to make a name for yourself in this new

world. Battle against other players for the number one spot in the game. What's the best part? It's free!

Is it free? Of course! Do you need software? No. This is totally web-based.

First Impression: Looks like a good game.

6 - Wulfram II

<http://www.wulfram.com>

This is another game that requires software. However, this software is free! Wulfram II is another 'world war' type of game. Wulfram II puts you in the midst of 3D futuristic real time strategy warfare. Battles are fought by two warring factions on one of many different vast planetary terrains.

Is it free? Yes, but they do ask for donations. Do you need software? Yes (it's free).

First Impression: Let's think here ... free software ... great 3D graphics ... good game play ... I'd say this game is worth taking a look at!

7 - Archmage

<http://archmage.magewar.com>

Archmage is a web-based strategy game where you are a reincarnated mage whose soul has survived the Great Mages War, a devastating war which destroyed most of the mages and the magic which had existed on your world of Terra. You need no software to play this game. It's also free.

Is it free? Yeah, that's what I just said. Do you need software? Nope.

First Impression: Looks like a nice D&D style game online. Not sure though ...

8 - Simulated Sports

<http://www.simulatedsports.com>

Text-based basketball and horse racing. You get a team/horse and try to make some money from them. In basketball mode, you recruit your team and schedule their games. In horse racing you recruit horses and jockeys and then try to make the most money you can out of their races.

Is it free? Yes. Do you need software? No.

First Impression: Well, there are a lot of sports games out there, but this one is fairly well-established with a huge gaming community, so it should be good.

9 - Merchant Empires

<http://advancedpowers.com>

Merchant Empires is unique because not only does it involve tactics and strategy, but it has also incorporated a certain amount of role-playing. Merchant Empires is real-time and text-based but is also very graphically involved. It'll be interesting to see how good this game really is.

Is it free? Yes. Do you need software? Nope.

First Impression: Interesting interaction between strategy and roleplaying. Could turn out to be a really sweet game!

10 - Droid Arena

<http://www.droidarena.com>

Build your robot, give it consciousness, and send it to beat other robots. You have to program your robot how to fight. There are clans, and the ability to bet on fights to make more money. There's a 14-day free trial, but after that you have to pay a fee.

Is it free? No, it's \$8 per season (3 months). Do you need software? No.

First Impression: Looks stunning.

Hattrick

Soccer to the Extreme

MATT MINGUS enjoys online football ...

Hattrick is all about soccer (or football to anyone who's not from the USA). The game requires you to manage, develop, train, and lead your own soccer team. You've been commissioned to turn 18 inexperienced, poorly playing soccer players into the next World Cup Champions. This is Hattrick and this is soccer to the extreme.

There are many elements of game play in Hattrick. Here's the scenario: you choose a country (there are nearly fifty to choose from, anywhere from the USA to Brazil to Sweden and back to Mexico!). Then, you wait a few days until you're assigned to a team. After you're assigned to a team, you are expected to bring in funds for the club that supports the team and to help your team compete with other teams. When you first start out, your team has little in the way of talent and experience. You must train them to become better developed players. The fun part is that you get to choose what area of expertise you'd like to develop them in. See, in Hattrick (as in most soccer games and real life teams) there are positions. To make each position more effective, you need to assign a player who has the most talent in whatever that position needs. For example, John O'Conner has a lot of talent in defending so you put him in the Central Defender position. So if you need some better defenders, than you'll want to train your team in defending. If you need some new forwards, train your team in scoring. It's easy.

Obviously, as a new player, you don't start out with an all-star team. In order to gain new team members you must buy them from other Hattrick players. You're given a large sum of money to work with, but not enough to make it easy. You're also going to need that money for other areas of the game, such as building and improving your soccer arena, or pumping money into 'The Club' (we'll cover these in a second). Anyway, by looking out for the best buys and maybe even selling some of your lacking players to earn money, you can make a fairly good team at the beginning of the game. Eventually, you probably won't have to buy many new players. Every week, 'The Club' will allow you to take one youth player out of the youth team and use him in your team. Now, the new teammate may be really good or really bad. It all depends on one thing: how much money you pump into the youth team. You can give them no money at all, a low amount of money, a medium amount, or a high amount. Relatively, if you give a large amount to the youth team, you will get better players. If you don't give any money to the youth team, the players aren't very good. One fun feature of the game is that after every 14-week season, the players get one year older. Now, a younger player (ages 17-22) is easier to train and to nurture into the ultimate soccer machine, but older players are more stubborn and harder to train, even if they have more experience and leadership. So you want a younger team.

There are *tons* of other features to the game. For instance, your team has its own arena and fan club. If your fan club is large and enthusiastic, lots of people will show up at your team's games. If it's small and irritated, there will be fewer people. You should build your arena according to your fan club's size and attitude. If you build too much, too fast, you'll lose money and maybe even go bankrupt in the end. Another great feature is the games. Every Sunday, league games are played. Friendly games are played on Wednesdays. Cup games and other special games are played on Thursdays. When a game is played, the game gives you a history of what happened in text form, who scored what goal, who played well, who played poorly. It's all there. It even tells you what you need to improve to get better and rates your players. It's very interesting.

Now, as with any game, there are some things that people might not like about it. For example, it's all text. Yes, it has pictures and such, but like most online games, it's lacking in the graphics department. Also, it got a little boring between game days. There's only so much to do with a

team when they're not playing game. I didn't enjoy waiting for three to four days to play a game. It was fun when it came, but the wait was painful agonizing!

That's about the only downside to the game, though. The community is

Hattrick is very good. Not once did I receive an error or any other kind of problem. The server it is hosted on must be huge to hold so much information and be so incredibly fast. I was very impressed with how quickly the pages loaded and how fast I could navigate through the game. This is most likely because the game is hosted by ExtraLives

<http://www.extralives.com>

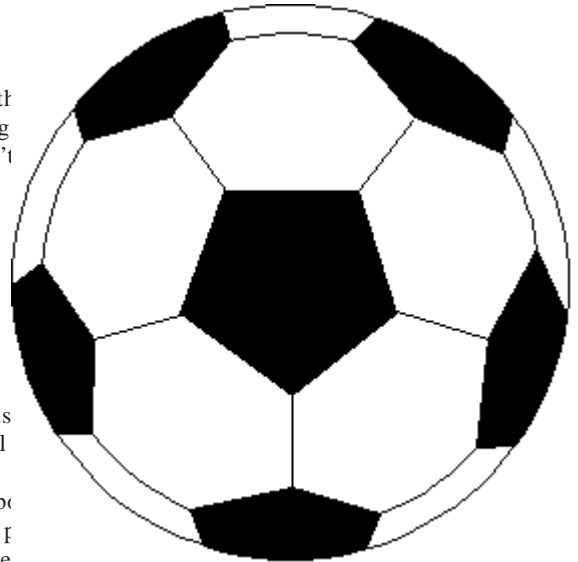
and they are hosted on the company's massive server. The interface of Hattrick was dull, yet served its purpose well. With a great navigational system and customizable links (you can choose to either have a drop down menu or regular links), it was easy to get around in Hattrick. With so many links and places to go in the game, I was surprised at the ingenious link system. Hats off to the developers!

The community and player support around this game was fantastic! I had no idea people could care so much about an online game. There were *tons* of sites loaded with Hattrick information and stats. There are programs that you can download that can figure out what the best size arena is for your team, or what players to assign to what positions. It was amazing. I was also impressed by the message board activity. There is a message board for each Hattrick series, each Hattrick country, and one for the entire Hattrick community. They are monitored by Global Masters (or GMs) who moderate each country's message board and player exchanges (just to make sure there's no cheating!). The Hattrick Team (or HTs) are very involved with the game's development and make frequent updates and patches for the game. There are also lots of IRC chat rooms and independently run message boards all dedicated to this great game. All in all, the players of Hattrick are very dedicated people who want to make the most of their game.

Basically, Hattrick somehow incorporates management, diligence, and perseverance all into one huge game - without taking away the fun of it. With amazing community spirit and a nice layout, Hattrick is one of the most organized and player supported games I've ever had the pleasure of playing. I recommend this game, not only to the soccer fanatics, but to anyone looking for a fun game to play. It's never been so much fun to micro-manage.

The low-down

- * Great game play
- * Good 2D graphics, but not a whole lot of them
- * Text-based
- * Amazing stability
- * Awesome message board system/help sites



Adventure Games

Quest, Dungeonworld and Aspects of Might

Players report on these three adventure games

WHEN I'M asked what sort of PBM/PBeM game it's best to start in, I usually recommend trying the adventure games. There's lots to discover, there are plenty of other players and contacting them is part of the fun, and because adventure games are open-ended, the sort of early mistake which a novice makes won't prove disastrous.

All of these three games are mainly computer-moderated, but their moderators will respond swiftly to players' ideas, which keeps the games alive and growing. We asked the moderators to suggest players who'll give you some idea of their games and it's been good to see the enthusiastic response. Our thanks to all ...

Aspects of Might (Silver Dreamer) - Christine Gentry

Aspects of Might is a play-by-email game, with a fantasy setting based to a large extent upon the Tarot. Turns are computer moderated, although the Astral Web (see below) allows the GM to converse with PCs and provide descriptions of significant events. Players run one or more major characters, and can through play acquire an array of hirelings and hangers-on. Turns run weekly, and are posted out to players by email.

The AoM world is in a state of disarray: civilisation having crumbled into ruins many years before, when the Aspects (the various Tarot cards, which serve as god-types in AoM) abandoned Mankind, and the darkness of the Penance descended. Play started as the Aspects returned. Players' characters enjoy a direct link to an Aspect and are known as the Aspected: it has fallen to them to make sense of their surroundings and attempt to rebuild the world as it once was.

This can be done in one of several ways, for one of the game's great strengths is the multiple levels of play it allows. You can play characters in an established centre such as Perivale, aspire to chivalry in Knight's Cross, or fend for yourself in newly-Awakened Applegate. In any of these places it is possible to accumulate political power and influence, or develop new and interesting ideas and structures. If you would rather build uninterrupted by others, you can start in a village of your own, with three characters and no other players immediately nearby. In addition, there are any number of quests in which you can participate.

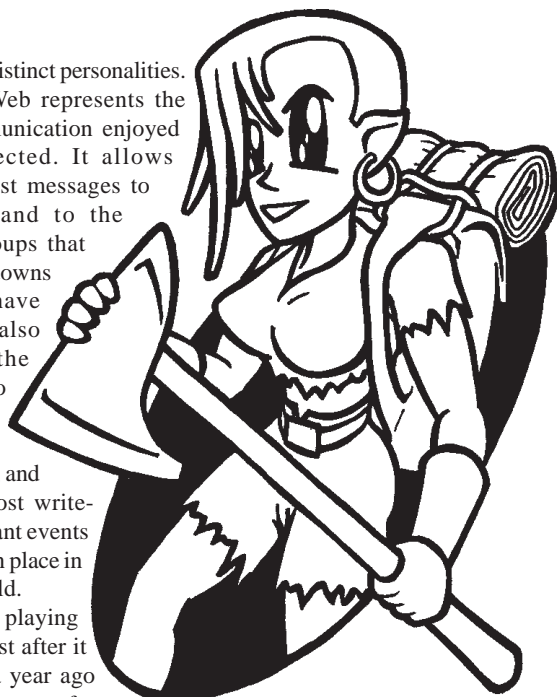
Having decided where you will start, the next important choice is the type of character to be played. The combinations of Aspects and races of Man allow you to pick the areas in which your characters will excel (although the stats themselves are randomly generated). Some characters will have the capacity to write the fragments of Lore needed to set civilisation back upon its feet. Other characters will lack lore-scribing skills but be more physically endowed, a useful talent in a world full of creatures wishing to maim or eat the unwary. Increasing one's stats is far from difficult, so it is possible for even the most muscle-bound hulk eventually to aspire to a more scholarly bent.

The game is ideally suited to group play - the combination of fragments needed means that trade is necessary, and the limited supply of land means that some control is necessary to stop toes being trodden on. It is the Astral Web that facilitates this group play, and allows the characters to

develop into distinct personalities.

The Astral Web represents the mental communication enjoyed by the Aspected. It allows players to post messages to each other and to the various e-groups that the different towns and quests have spawned. It also allows the characters to communicate with the various NPCs, and the GM to post write-ups of important events that have taken place in the game world.

I've been playing AoM since just after it started over a year ago now, and have gone from play-by-email virgin to dedicated junkie (up to 11 characters now and no signs of stopping soon!). The players are a friendly lot, the turnaround is fast, and the nature of the game is such that even a newbie can get involved right from the off. A wholehearted thumbs up from me!



DungeonWorld (Madhouse) - Dave Harris

DungeonWorld is advertised as 'The Largest Play-By-Mail Fantasy Adventure RPG Ever Made', but what's it all about?

A starting position usually consists of two characters. Now, unlike many games, although most characters spend their time as a member of an adventuring party, characters are individuals. This means that you can have them in the same location and travelling together, or they can be on opposite sides of the Kingdom. This feature is probably one of the main reasons why DW is so successful. If you hear of a new mission being formed or a new location opening up, you don't have to spend ages trying to move your party there. You can simply start up a new character nearby. Most missions start in Dungeon Courtyards, which is where most new characters begin. Of course, you can also start up near a Magic Trader and as these are scattered across dungeons at all levels, this makes it easy to join an existing mission.

The game is set on the world of Myriad, in a Kingdom called Bereny. You can explore the surface, delve into one of the many dungeons or, if you know how, explore the Underworld, which is rumoured to be as large as the surface, which is very large indeed.

OK, so you have your new characters: what are you going to do with them? Well, the most obvious thing is to join in with the 'Grand Plot'. This is the GM's ongoing storyline, which rarely unfolds in a predictable manner. Here is a brief run down on the developments so far. King Mark's soul has been captured by one of the five Lords of the Dead. His brother Duke David, Regent at the time, has mounted an expedition to save him. Duke Dirk Steadfast (a player character!) has been made interim Regent. Meanwhile, the demon Princess has finally been killed. Before she died, however, she gave dire warnings of the consequences of opening a portal to the Land of the Dead. Will the mission to save King Mark doom the kingdom?

Adventure Games at a glance

Aspects of Might: Silver Dreamer, www.silverdrea@aol.com

Start-up £2.50, turns from £2.50

DungeonWorld: Madhouse, www.madcentral.com

Start-up plus 2 turns £5, turns from £2

Quest: www.kjcgames.com

Start-up free, turns from £2.10

A huge black globe has appeared in the South. All who enter are never seen again. It has recently begun sending out great bursts of lightning. What is this thing and is it connected with the Royal mission? Then again, it could be connected with the High Phalian Guard. This mysterious race has recently re-appeared in the land, claiming all the Glacier Barbarians who have begun plying their trade in Bereny as their slaves.

Did I mention that the sun failed to rise yesterday? A group of enchanters has now been formed to attempt to find out the cause. We can only hope they are successful.

If you can't find anything in that lot to play with, then there is still player interaction. The Masterbone is a player-run band of monsters who were recently driven out of Mirrormane at great cost. What's more, two of Bereny's premier Guilds have mounted player dungeon raids. If you want player-player interaction, this is the cutting edge. If taking on a human player isn't your thing, then most of the Guilds in the game have on-going missions to hunt down a renowned NPC bad guy. Or you could simply see how far down you can get in a Dungeon.

Plenty to discover, plenty to do and a huge amount of player interaction via the many email lists. What more could you want in a game?

Quest (KJC Games) - Dan Read

I first found **Quest** when at school. Being new to PBM, I was fascinated, and became immersed in the world of Kharne. But a few years on, I knew all there was to know about the game as it stood then - all of the workings had long since been calculated by players, so the lack of challenge led me to drop out. The initial design was for each game to have a finite length, and to be honest it showed. All the older groups were walking around with +3 armour, +3 axes and so on in a uniform 'Best' set-up, and it was luck, not skill or tactics, that decided who won a battle between parties.

But one day a KJC flyer made me nostalgic, so I restarted. It turned out to be a pivotal time for the game, and I've never looked back!

The first massive change was billed as 'The Second Age', a totally dynamic combat system. Imagine paper/scissors/stone with dozens of options and you're close! This turned a predictable hack-n-slash game into something quite unlike any other PBM I know. Packaged with subclasses (both monster and character), expansions to the alliances within the game and a few other minor tweaks, it already made Quest something special. But KJC Games weren't finished ...

The idea of human moderation was first floated at one of the regular pubmeets held by KJC. No longer would parties be moving round in a glorified zoo, where nothing they could do would change anything about Kharne itself. Aimed primarily at alliances, there would be the chance to build and wield world-changing influence and power. Some were sceptical. Others, who saw the opportunity for role-play, were delighted.

This moderation started 18 months ago. Every alliance has chosen from a wide range of causes, from city-state to guilds to religions. They each perform tasks for their causes (or themselves), with the availability of hand-moderated special actions. Artifacts are now in the game to be bought, found, stolen and lost, as are new skills, from etiquette to assessing fortifications. Politics are accessible, settlements can (and have) been taken by the city-states. Many alliances are even close to the point where characters could be elected into councils, when they will actually get to vote on their cause's future choices! Woven into this are moderated plotlines: intrigues and happenings that are local, concern (one or more) city-states, or are truly global in scale. The depth is impressive - they have a complexity that approaches tabletop role-playing, without losing the speed and ease of a computer-moderated PBM. Yet because the moderation is alliance based, it's not overwhelming, as experienced members are able to help new players learn the ropes.

So where does Quest go from here? It is already (in my opinion) the best commercial fantasy PBM available. But there's a long list of improvements still in the pipeline, from player-controlled shops to customising alliance headquarters.

From the acorn, an already mighty oak is still growing.

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Godfather

Head to Head, part 3

Two players take the roles of Waxey Gordon and Al Capone in this game of rival gangsters...

Turn 8 - Discoveries

Waxey Gordon - 'My decision to devote some enforcers to cruising has paid a dividend, with three new racket types discovered. First up is the Whoremaster racket which, unsurprisingly, allows you to set up brothels. These can earn substantial sums of money but are very expensive to set up. To get the full benefit you really need to build four brothels and employ a bagman to run them which will cost well over \$100,000 to do. This is a racket for later in the game when I have that sort of money.

Secondly, I have the Numbers racket. This is a much simpler street-based gambling racket. Like protection it is cheap to set up and it earns reasonable money. Unfortunately the police frequently close these rackets down and they are easily attacked by an enemy.

Finally, I have the Door-to-door racket. This allows me to sell lots more booze to customers who don't want to drink in illegal bars. Although it does not shift as much volume as the Independents racket I found last turn, the margins are much better. It does have the same problem as other street based rackets that it is easy to attack, but it still has to count as one of the most valuable rackets in the game.

The only disappointment is not finding any of Capone's rackets to attack, so I will have to carry on building up my own businesses. Interestingly, my boss and Al Capone were both operating in the same corner of the city last turn, so it looks like we had the same idea of cruising in the corner blocks looking for the other's premises. Fortunately I had nothing there for him to find.

Despite the risk of being attacked, I will set up some Door-to-door rackets next turn: they are too valuable to ignore. The set up costs are less than for boozers, but it is still quite expensive because I have to buy lots of vans to distribute booze, recruit runners to sell from door to door and expand my production capacity - so this will eat up all my spare cash. After my success last turn, I will send another two enforcers cruising for new rackets: there are still some very valuable rackets out there that I want to find.'

Al Capone - 'The cruising went well. My boys discovered a couple of nightclubs and a Protection racket. The locations of the nightclubs will be noted for future use! One of my guys spotted Waxey wandering around my turf, so he may know about one of my new rackets. Only time will tell. That and the absence of flying lead! I have a lot of choppers currently tied up on street rackets and a bit of a cash surplus again, so I'll transfer them to the enforcers and replace them with shiny new shotguns. While I'm at it, I think it's time to put in an order or two for dynamite with my local dealer... I still need to discover new rackets (where the heck are they hiding???)', so a cruise or two is in order as well.

I'll have to bide my time on striking back at the weasel, though. Pity.'

Turn 9 - Plotting and planning

Waxey Gordon - 'Another reasonably successful turn. Cruising this time turned up one new racket - Alky Cooking. This allows me to rope in local residents to make basic homebrew, which I can then cut with my own booze to increase volumes. It may not sound that exciting, but it

allows me to double the production of whiskey and liquor at relatively little cost. Buying liquor each turn to supply Door to door and Independents rackets can really dent your cash flow, so the Alky racket makes these rackets more attractive, especially Independents where the sale price for liquor is much reduced.

I also found one of Al Capone's nightclubs. I will try to destroy it this turn, although the revenue from one nightclub is fairly small.

The only real setback was that I failed to find enough local youths to act as runners for my new Door to door rackets. I probably should have devoted more enforcer time to this, because recruiting large numbers of staff is often difficult. As a result these new rackets will only sell about half the booze that they could have, and I will have to work harder to recruit many more runners next turn.

More good news is that I have been promoted one more level in the game hierarchy. I am now a Ganglord while Capone remains a lowly Mob Boss. This allows me to recruit two more enforcers and my rackets to cover three more city blocks each.

On the economics scores, my lead over Capone has slipped a little. Since the economics rating is an average of three turns (during which he suffered quite a bit from my attacks) I estimate that my lead in income for this turn has fallen substantially. This is not too surprising, because I have been quite cautious, for example by setting up extra production capacity and spending lots of time cruising. In income terms he is almost exactly one turn behind me.

While I have seen no signs of Capone trying to attack me, he is building up quite an armoury. In military terms he is now well ahead, something I need to try to correct.

My orders for next turn are therefore dominated by the need to buy equipment. Two of my enforcers will spend all their time trying to buy weaponry, recruit hoods to carry the weapons and recruit runners for my Door to door rackets. I also need to buy some vehicles and liquor. Despite this spending spree, the cash I can spend is limited by the number of weapons and men I can find. I will have some spare cash, which I will use to pay off some of my initial loan from Murder Incorporated. With the extortionate interest rates they charge, my initial loan of \$6,000 has grown to a debt of \$11,000.

I will also recruit one more enforcer, attack the nightclub of Capone's I found last turn and send one enforcer on a cruise command.'

Al Capone - 'First the bad news: Waxey is now a Gang Lord. This really ratchets up the pressure on me to rake in the dough otherwise he'll simply run away with the game with those extra enforcers he's going to recruit. Minor bad news is that one of my guys spotted three of his near one of my large warehouses. I'll have to fortify it, just in case! On the good news front, I pushed Waxey out of one of his Protection rackets and, at last!, discovered two new rackets: Independents and Whoremaster. Indies are a good earner, so I'll set up two of them this turn. I may add another warehouse this turn, though, to act as insurance in case Waxey turns up with an unwelcome gift somewhere.

Now, which of his nightclubs should be closed down...?'

Turn 10 - A setback and a lucky break

Waxey Gordon - 'After a long run of successful turns this time I face my first serious setbacks. The biggest was the failure of my attack on Capone's nightclub. Interestingly he had fortified the building which is a significant expense not usually worthwhile for a nightclub. Also Al Capone himself was operating in the building - presumably why he has invested in those defences. As a result my attack was beaten away and Wesley Goldstein,

Godfather at a glance

A crime game set in 1920s Chicago. Available in this two-player version, but also in a multi-player version and there's also an introductory solo game for novices. From Pagoda Games at £10 + 2 turns for startup, then £2.50 per turn.

my attacking enforcer, will be out injured for a couple of turns. I killed a couple of Capone's hoods but most survived unhurt. If I returned with two or three enforcers and more heavy armaments I could probably destroy the nightclub, but Capone will probably move to another location next turn - if I were to succeed in killing him the game would be over.

Meanwhile, Capone launched his first attack on me, destroying a nightclub. And the police closed down one of my nightclubs and shut down another protection racket. Thanks to these setbacks and my failure to recruit runners for my Door to door rackets my income actually fell this turn. I still have a lead over Capone, but it is shrinking while his lead over me on the military ranking is now quite big.

There is some good news: I have now managed to recruit some runners so my Door to door racket will start generating lots of cash next turn and I can set up some more. I also found two more rackets, although they are not particularly interesting. The Pawn shop racket earns average returns and each shop has fairly low turnover. Slightly more interesting is the Bookmaker racket. This will not earn huge sums, but each bookmaker's shop is cheap to build.

With three more Door to door rackets to set up I don't have many orders to decide next turn, especially since Wesley Goldstein is nursing his wounds. My boss will recruit another enforcer to bring me back up to the maximum allowed, a reasonably experienced enforcer will do another cruise command and my final spare enforcer will try to bring in more equipment: mainly hoods and choppers plus a few more vehicles. I am still playing catch-up on military power.'

Al Capone - 'Unfortunately, I'm still stuck at the Mob Boss level, so that's a two-turn jump that Waxey now has over me. However, I did get a bit of a lucky break, once again! Waxey attacked one of my warehouses as expected, but not the one I thought he'd go for. Inside, Al Capone was counting the takings when the grenades started to fly. The odds were two-to-one against us, but we beat them off and gave them a bloody nose! The boys partied a bit after that, I can tell you! Elsewhere, one of Waxey's nightclubs suffered an unfortunate 'accident' and we closed it down. Gang morale is now quite high, I'm glad to see. The Feds raided yet another Protection racket. You know, it used to be that we would get some sort of warning before they started to swoop in. I mean, just what are we paying the cops for, if not to look after our interests...?

I have big plans for this turn. I need to move Production and Distribution into the new warehouse and make sure it's fortified. Then, I'll set up two more Indy rackets and a new Opium racket and hire muscle and stock up on the hardware. Oh, and with the spare enforcer, a quick cruise is in order again!'

Turn 11 - The need to consider

Waxey Gordon - 'A quiet turn this time, with no attacks launched by either of us. My income increased quite nicely with the Door to door

booze rackets now working properly, but

I miscalculated the amount of cash I had to spare and ran out. As a result, a couple of my orders failed: I only set up two of the three planned additional Door to door rackets and I failed to recruit an extra enforcer. That is a silly waste of orders on my part. The planned expansion of my booze production capacity also stalled - if I fail again this turn then my Door to door rackets will run out of beer.

Another piece of bad news is that one of my new Door to door rackets has been closed down by the police, which seems harsh because he had only just started out.

My protection bagman has tangled once again with one of Capone's as they try to operate in the same block. Together with the racket I spotted on a cruise last turn I now have two targets I could usefully attack, so I think that it is time to go back onto the attack. Attacking protection rackets is less and less useful later in the game. Other rackets, such as Door to door, are much more valuable and the police will close down most protection rackets sooner or later. (In fact, all but one of my protection bagmen are now in jail.)

Nevertheless, I think that it is worth attacking. If I am lucky, I will succeed in taking out some other rackets as happened with my attacks early in game. Also I am rather short of cash at the moment, having run out last turn, and attacking Capone is cheaper than building more boozers.

With two enforcers launching attacks and one still injured that leaves four more enforcers available. My boss will try to recruit another enforcer again, I will try to set up one more Door to door racket since I already have the runners to operate it, one enforcer will do cruise area command and I will again try to buy more weapons and vehicles to fuel the ongoing war.'

Al Capone - 'Rule one: always keep an eye on the finances. I hadn't left myself enough cash to fully stock the new warehouse so it's looking a touch empty when the Distributor turns up with his vans...

I finally made Gang Lord, so I can recruit those extra enforcers and, maybe more importantly, increase the area my rackets cover. Every street racket will be adding five blocks to its turf this turn. I also finally discovered Door-to-Door and, would you know, it was in an area run by Waxey. So, I'll set up my first new racket on top of his as a thankyou for the ungentlemanly way he has been behaving recently. I'll also add Numbers and another Opium. And I definitely need another warehouse! I'm also going to have to hire a lot more hoods and equip them: I'm hoping that Waxey will look at the military rating and decide to stay away for a while, thus giving me a bit more breathing room to catch up.

Despite all the expenses, I have made sure to leave enough in the safe for the Production people to install new vats and stills! Those pesky Feds closed yet another Protection racket. I think I'll take the hint.'



To be continued ...

Worlds Apart

Not just one world to choose from!

PETER THORNHILL tries this challenging roleplaying game ...

WE'VE ALL heard the phrase 'tough luck' and you may also have heard 'tough love' as another, but I bet there are few of you who have come across 'tough fantasy' before! Well, welcome to tough fantasy in the shape of **Worlds Apart**.

Worlds Apart is a hand-moderated, single character, fantasy roleplaying game from experienced moderator Colin Andrews. He himself describes it as a game 'set in a group of worlds ravaged by the Gods' war' and there is no way I am going to argue with his description. This is fantasy without the elves frolicking in the woodlands, without the dwarves drinking copious amounts of ale and singing endless songs about gold. This is not a game in which the player's character wanders the countryside, dispensing justice and aid to hapless maidens, and generally doing 'good deeds' for the benefit of all. Nor is it a game in which your character can go around committing evil acts and constantly escaping the consequences. Certainly, in the early stages, the most important part of the game from a player's point of view, will be keeping your character alive! You quickly come to the realisation that your character is but an insignificant small part of the worlds in which you find yourself and just getting to the end of the day, sane, alive and out of jail, is going to be a victory in itself!

Don't get me wrong, Worlds Apart is not a hard game to play. From a setup point of view, it could be viewed as pretty standard fare, from the choosing of skills, to the allocation of a number of points to different characteristics. The rulebook explains this thoroughly and with one aspect that a number of others could benefit from: an example from the GM of a character set-up and history. This example runs throughout the rulebook and there is no doubt it makes not only the whole set-up operation, but also the rest of the rulebook, simpler to follow and understand. Worlds Apart also has an unusual twist in the setup in that, not only do you choose what skills your character has and what equipment they have, but you also need to choose which of four worlds you would like to start in. The worlds themselves form part of the Worlds Apart universe and travel is possible between them, though not as a simple or easy (or even desirable!) operation. The four starting ones from which you can make your choice vary from a desert world to a frozen wasteland, from a world broken and torn by a magical war to a temperate world of knights and feudal chivalry. With a (known) pantheon of fifteen Gods to follow and whatever skills you can think of, the set-up provides the opportunity to personalise your character in whatever way you want. Racially, you may choose any of what can be considered to be the 'normal' fantasy races, such as dwarves, elves, halflings etc, but Colin introduces the first tiny note of caution here. Choose what race you like but be aware that along with racial special abilities, come racial restrictions 'which the GM will advise you on'.

The survivor

OK, having already praised the idea of examples in rulebooks, let's take the idea a logical step further and provide you with the example of my own character from the game. Sara is a young elven wife and mother of twins with a simple life in the woodlands of my chosen world of Carinth. Without warning, or any clear motive, her village is raided by a group of

bandits who kill everyone and burn the place to the ground. Sara, knocked unconscious in the early part of the attack and bleeding copiously from a head wound, is obviously left for dead

and on coming round is faced with the ruination of her whole way of life and the deaths, not only of her immediate beloved family, but also of her whole village. I do like a good vengeance story!

So, ten skills to start with. As a rural elf, Trapping, Tracking, Moving Silently and Hiding in Shadows seem reasonably relevant for putting food on the table and Cooking soon follows as another useful skill. With two young children, First Aid does not seem totally out of place and with a husband in the militia, use of the Shortbow is also a relevant skill. Having made Sara a follower of Morag, Goddess of Life and the Earth, the skills of Herbalism and Natural Earth Magic are taken and Singing also. Why singing? Well, I just thought it fitted the character!

The five main characteristics that a character has are Combat Ability, Vitality (or health), Scouting Ability, Perception and Magic Power. Every tweak that takes place in one of those, combined with your slowly-rising skills, provides you with your combat factors. Train with a shortbow and your missile skills improve; increase your Combat Ability and a (small) rise appears in all of your factors. So with a roughly average score across all five statistics and having spent most of her available money providing herself with a basic set of equipment, Sara buries her family and leaves for the nearest town.

Perilous surroundings

And here the toughness of the game starts to show. Colin's first turn response brings the unwelcome information that there is very little love lost indeed between the elves and the other races of Carinth. Suspicion and dislike are the order of the day and, through a chance encounter with a group of peasants just outside the town, it becomes immediately obvious that, as an elf, Sara is going to be out of place in the nearby town of The Citadel. With little money to her name and no clues to the identity of the village's attackers however, she has little choice but to press on. The decision, as part of her set-up, to buy a cloak with a large hood capable of hiding her distinctive elven ears suddenly seems to be a very good idea!



Worlds Apart at a glance

Fantasy roleplaying game from Colin Andrews, set across four dangerous worlds. Startup plus 4 turns is £4 with subsequent turns at £4.

Entering the town (with a very detailed map provided by the GM), a glance at the town notice board reveals an interesting advert from a herbalist in the town seeking someone to gather herbs for sale in her shop. Making a mental note to visit the shop the next day, Sara searches for a tavern in which not only to spend the night but also with a view to attempting to see if she can find employment as a cook. Revenge is still most definitely on her mind but, with little money, fewer combat skills and no information on which to base her search, steady employment seems like a good place to start.

And here we go again! Sara, almost immediately, receives an offer to try out as cook's assistant in the tavern and, equally quickly, has her concealed identity exposed by a bounty hunter on the look-out for elves! Fortunately, he is only after dark elves and, who knows, he may turn out to be a useful contact at some stage in the future as a man like him, operating on the fringes of the law, could well have useful information about the bandits that attacked the village. But the ease with which her identity has been exposed is a very rude shock, especially coming on only the second turn!

And there is more to follow! As Sara heads for the herbalist's shop the next day, there is a note addressed to her pinned to the town notice board - written in Elvish! So much for hiding her identity! Muttering under her breath, Sara snatches the note, which turns out to be from another player, and heads off to the herbalist. She, having checked Sara's knowledge of the different varieties of herbs, is satisfied enough to offer the opportunity to gather herbs in a number of different expeditions. Sara decides to buy a small packet of cooking herbs with which to enhance the flavour of the somewhat standard fare of the tavern where she is hoping to get some work. Returning to the inn, Sara spends a long, hard evening working in the kitchens, trying desperately to impress the owner of the inn with her delicately-flavoured pies and pasties.

On top of all of her other troubles, Sara is now having trouble sleeping, as her nights are disturbed by nightmarish visions of the burning of the village and the deaths of her family. With physical exhaustion from

tiredness adding to her problems, Sara is pleased to receive a small amount of good news in that the innkeeper, Aetheldark, is happy to offer a job as cook's assistant. The pay is virtually non-existent and the hours are long, but she has a roof over her head and the tavern appears to be a good place to pick up information. There appears to be something mysterious about Aetheldark as well, but Sara can't quite put her finger on what is wrong.

All appears to be going well and she has gained the grudging respect of the tavern's ageing cook when, one lunchtime, a group of bandits arrive at the inn, calling for food, ale and the services of a couple of the tavern's 'waitresses'. They seem to know Aetheldark well and the entire tavern is galvanised to serve them with whatever they want. The kitchen is soon a frenzy of activity, with people rushing in and out carrying steaming platters for the bandits, and the ovens turning cherry-red with heat as the food is rushed out. One of them, a filthy dwarf by the name of Aghul, seems particularly fond of Sara's pies and consumes them, and copious amounts of ale, with considerable gusto (and some table manners I'd rather not discuss here!). Sara gets the afternoon off to visit the herbalist's again to begin planning a herb collecting trip but, on her return to the inn, is met by a worried-looking Aetheldark. Aghul has been taken ill and the doctor is currently with him! Things go from bad to worse as the surgeon comes down the stairs, announcing that the dwarf has died; not only that, but he has to inform the Watch and close the inn. Somewhat surprised, the landlord asks 'Why?'

'The dwarf was poisoned,' replies the surgeon!

To be continued ...

At this point in Sara's story, I took part in an over-the-table game organised by the GM. A report, written by Colin, will form the next part of this review of Worlds Apart and will give the reader quite a bit more background on the game. The third and final part of the review will cover Sara's attempts to evade the accusing fingers being pointed at her as 'the cook's assistant who likes to add things to the pies', her subsequent adventures and my overall impressions of the game. Don't go away!

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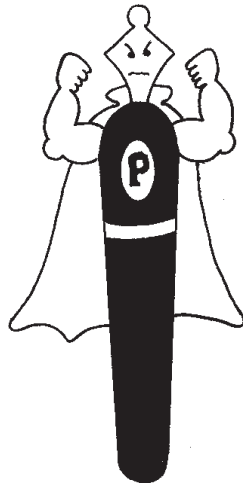
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THE MIGHTY PEN



Web Gaming for Fun and Profit?

[Here are some queries that a reader sent re Mo Holkar's article last issue, and Mo's reply. We're including the two letters because we think that the subject is of general interest...]

I found Mo Holkar's column last issue very interesting. I'm planning to create a web gaming business and it's very difficult to find front line information like this. It will not be run in English at first, though if successful we'll try your language in the future. I would like a bit more information about two points noted in the column.

The first is about dropouts. Is there such a high dropout rate? How can a business survive when 75% of players drop out? How can you retain them? I understand that many players will not pay if they're losing the game, so how can you keep them? We're planning to offer a soccer game and a sci-fi one. Both of them need long-term players to be balanced. It would be almost impossible with such a rate of deserters.

The second is about security. After reading what happened to KoK and your prophetic words 'You can guarantee that someone will hack your game before more than a couple of months are out', I would like to know what security systems would you recommend? We'll create a log in validation system for our players. Is there any specific software designed to provide enough confidence? How do you deal with so many hacks a year?

We have no previous experience in web gaming enterprises so your words will be very useful. Just a last question: do you know any other magazine specialized in web turn-based games other than Flagship? There isn't one in my own language and my only other 'available' language is English.

'Duke' (name supplied to editor)

Mo Holkar replied...

Yes, dropouts are a very difficult area. Note, first, that when I said 75% dropout rate I was talking about games which are free to play. Once people have paid money, the dropout rate is lower, more like 30-40% maybe. This is still too high to preserve game balance easily! But there are strategies possible for dealing with the problem. One possibility is that you offer the dropout positions to other players to take over, so there is a continuity of opposition. Maybe this would have to be at a reduced price, if the position is a losing one. Or you may ask people to pay for the whole game (or the whole football season) in advance. Or you can apply a 'filtering' system so that your serious, dedicated players, who've already proven that they will not drop out, play in leagues against other proven players, and your newcomers play only against each other until they are trusted not to drop out.

Another strategy is to make players commit to you emotionally. If your site offers a good community, with discussions, friendships, etc, people will be less likely to drop out than if it is a faceless business. If you sell people 'membership of the community' instead of selling them 'turns in the game', they will be happier to stay.

There are some ideas, anyway. But the best advice is to design a game which can survive dropouts. For example, looking at football games, a fantasy football game has no real problem with dropouts, but a football

management game is much more seriously affected.

Website security is a big subject and one on which I'm not an expert, but I'll tell you what I know! This is a very good discussion of the risks and how to deal with them:

www.w3.org/Security/Faq/

Starting with a login system is a good idea for securing players' details from each other. If you're using Apache, the *.htaccess* system is a good simple one for doing this.

Your CGI scripts which accept players' orders are very vulnerable and should be constructed with great care. Anything which might allow a hacker, perhaps by editing a copy of the submitting web page, to access system commands, is potentially disastrous. Techniques will depend on what language you are using, but basically the idea is to verify and clean every possible type of player input.

You will need a proper firewall for the server which is running the game - preferably a hardware firewall (ie. a dedicated computer), or a software one if you can't do that. The way these work is you can specify what types of access you will allow from where on the Internet. So you might say that Web browsing is allowed from anywhere, FTP and SSH are only allowed from your own machine, Telnet is not allowed at all.

You'll need a good tool to analyse server logs regularly and alert you if any unusual activity is happening.

And you'll need to keep up-to-date with the latest security news and software patches. For example, last year we read in the morning about a new vulnerability that had been discovered in Apache. We had downloaded the patch and were just about to install it that afternoon, when a hacker exploited it and got into our system! Fortunately we were able to get rid of him before any damage was caused.

Essentially the summary is that you will have to become knowledgeable in this field, or else find someone else who is! But there is a lot of good information on the Web about it, and a lot of very helpful people on mailing lists and newsgroups who will be happy to advise you on whether what you've done is OK.

I don't know of any other magazine, no. It seems that Flagship is the only one...

I hope this has been helpful! - thank you for writing.

When's my turn?

I must take issue with Kevin O'Keefe (letters #98) when he talks about constant turnaround. I myself play in games with regular deadlines (from several times a day to monthly) but have always enjoyed other types of games as well, ones with vast scope which run to variable deadlines owing to the amount of work the GM has to put in.

Pressurising the GMs of such games often leads to the game folding. If you're in a game that has an irregular turnaround, stick with it if the game is good: this will also give you time to play more games!

Jason Brown

I heartily, heartily agree with Kevin O'Keefe. Turnaround is so important, I always want info on this. Perhaps make it mandatory for computer-moderated games, and leave it out of hand-moderated games for the reasons you gave? One of the reasons I played **Gameplan** by Danny & Peter for so long is that the turnaround was clockwork - one day late and Danny would apologise. Very important.

Rob Matthews

In bad taste?

I think the article on **Lunatic Online** was in extremely bad taste.

If mental illness is a source of entertainment, then what next? You can try to rationalise it by saying that it's only a game and all that nonsense, but stuff like, 'It's never felt so good to be insane!' and, 'It's just plain fun being a mental institute patient! :) ' are not acceptable these days. I'm not the sort of person to go running to pressure groups or the media, but they would probably have a field day at our collective expense! We can't change the fact that the game is there, but did you need to give it such favourable coverage? As far as I can make out from the article, there is no need to set this game in a mental institution, so why feature it? You should have spiked the article as soon as you received it, if it was

unsolicited. If you *did* commission it... It might be a great game engine, but the context is surely unacceptable in an enlightened society? The article made me ashamed to be a Flagship subscriber. Goodness only knows what readers are thinking if they are related to or know people with mental problems.

Andy Bushby

[Hmm, yes, it was my decision to pick the article from among several others because I thought it was fun to read. I can't claim to have good taste, but I think myself that the fear of being misunderstood and locked away by the supposedly sane is a pretty strong one, and worth a game. I'll be interested to see what other readers think.]

Hacked

A cautionary tale. The Saturnalia South web site has been trashed. Whether by malicious action or ineptitude is unproven. However, the reaction of the ISP, AOL, was something of an eye-opener. Their position? AOL provide the web space but it is beholden of the user to secure and backup. If the data is hacked or lost, then there is nothing that AOL can do to restore/recover it. And apparently, this is the position taken by most of the major ISPs who offer free web space to their subscribers. So, take care. Assume the worst possible scenario and backup all of your precious web pages.

As such, the Saturnalia South web resource is now closed. I will be moving what remains to a web hosting company shortly. I'll ask *Flagship*

to update *Galactic View* when available.

Mike Absololm

[Mike's experience supports last issue's article on Computer Security following the hack on the Kings of Karadon computer at Hunky Monkey. And we've heard at second hand that yet another firm is dealing with a similar problem. We'll repeat our warning to readers: both firms and players can suffer from hacking, but there are ways to guard against this.]

Writing for Flagship?

What kind of guidelines might you provide to writers of potential articles on PBM games? Do you have an average word limit that you prefer not to exceed for example? Any hints you could give to me in regards to my writing of an article would be appreciated.

(Name supplied to editor)

[Printing this in case other readers wonder about the same questions. Yes, we do have guidelines for reviewers and diary writers, and will be happy to send these to anyone who's interested in writing an article. However, the guidelines are just that, not a straightjacket, so feel free to submit a draft for consideration, anyway: I'll suggest alterations if necessary. Around 1750 words fill a page and 3500 fill two pages. Illos are nice, of course: it's helpful if you can supply something suitable from the rulebook or turns of the game described.]

Your Feedback on Issue 98

You rated last issue at a worthy 8.6, and there's still no quarrel with us extending our coverage into other types of gaming. Way to go, still, of course, and we don't want to lose our existing readership. **David Blair** says 'as more genres become interesting to me, I avidly read the lot!', but **Rob Matthews**, an ex-reader who's just comes back, rated the issue at 6. He still feels that 'for a player with little RPG and PBM interest any more, (whereas I used to play 10 games+) most of the articles really aren't that interesting for me.' Several of you lament the absence of new games, but there's more about them this issue. I feel myself that it's the web which is attracting new game designers.

Articles you praised were *Discovering Sci-Fi Games*, *Phoenix*, the *Godfather diary* ('mainly as Waxey seems aggressive and fun' - **Rob Matthews**), *Lords of the Earth* ('a good writer and - seemingly - a good game' - **Jason Brown**), the articles on game design and computer security ('I was reassured to see that I had already done everything recommended in the computer security article' - **Andy Bushby**), and the roleplaying coverage ('interesting, with Gary Forbes' piece provoking some discussion at my local games group - **Jason Brown**). Rumours from the Front remains a favourite ('So many different games to tempt the reader' - **Michael Grant**).

Lunatic Online produced a response that varied from 'what fun!' (**Mark Avery**) to **Andy Bushby's** letter of protest in *Mighty Pen*. **Rob Matthews** makes the point that 'some of the ongoing diaries... are hard to access'; yes, we'll try to provide a synopsis in future. Some of you found the Austerlitz diary difficult to follow; some weren't interested in game design or sports; some wanted a wider range of sports GMs - so be sure to send your own suggestions in. **Martin Burroughs** 'missed Bob McLain!'

Question 4 asked whether you play overseas games. 68% don't at all, 32% do, but no-one is hostile to the idea. ('Only because I have enough games going on that are all UK-based. May try some in the future' - **Michael Grant**.) Email is now the universally approved medium. ('I have played overseas games by post in the past, and I would certainly play overseas games by email now - **Andy Bushby**.) 'Overseas games?' says **Jason Brown**, 'I think this is an increasingly irrelevant classification. Since the vast majority of players have access to email, as do GMS, whether the game is run from London, Redneckville Nebraska, or Mars is of little interest to me. If the game is good I'll play it.'

Question 5 asked which GMs you would like us to interview. Not everyone likes GM interviews, but those of you who do nominated: KJC's Richard Brewster and Madhouse's Steve Tierney ('Both do an incredibly difficult job under tremendous pressure. Both deserve medals as do all the staff for their tireless dedication,' - **Michael Grant**); Colin Forbes; me (nah, you get quite enough of me anyway); Harlequin's Sam Roads; Geoff Squibb. We'll see what we can do. **Wayne Yeadon** suggests that 'maybe some who don't get mentioned as much as others would be good ones to start with...'

Finally, we asked what you'd like to find on a cover CD. Many of you suggest reviews; adverts from PBM firms, including the smaller ones; sample turn reports; rulebooks; a list of company websites; **Martin Burroughs** suggests 'archives of zine-type games' and **Andy Busby** thinks that 'the usual mapping utilities might be handy'. Many thanks to all who wrote in; we do appreciate your input.

Feedback questions on #99

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

- 1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (X-ecrable) to 10 (X-cellent).
- 2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
- 3 - Which bored you, and why?
- 4 - When a new game appears, should we
 - (a) simply announce it in Newsdesk with a brief description,
 - (b) run an article from an existing player right away,
 - (c) wait for the formal review,
 - (c) wait for new players to provide Rumours comments?
- 5 - Good taste and bad taste is a difficult area in any medium. Do you feel a game may be in bad taste because of its subject matter, or because of its tone? Would you reject a game that
 - (a) mirrors current warfare,
 - (b) has a heavy sexual content,
 - (c) rewards anti-social behaviour,
 - (d) involves madness?
- 6 - What would you like to see in issue 100? (Apart from a greasy fiver, that is!)

[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the UK office, or by email to carol@flagship-pbm.co.uk. By November 14th, please.]

Middle Earth PBM

The End Game

JEFFERY DOBBERPUHL concludes his series for novices ...



'...and the tale of their long waiting and labours was come to fulfilment.'
Lord of the Rings III.

THE END GAME of Middle Earth Play By Mail can be a chaotic time. By the time the End Game has occurred, the surviving nations are typically running at maximum efficiency. Their population centers can support the strongest characters and biggest armies. The characters are well skilled and many carry powerful artifacts. However, the ability to pin down the opponent to a specific final battle can be difficult at best and nearly impossible at worst.

The End Game should probably be defined as that part of the game where one side or the other, the Free Peoples or the Dark, has significant numerical superiority over the other. During this time period, all of the plans established during the opening moves, and during the mid-game,

come to fruition or show their weaknesses. Players need to focus on finding and eliminating the enemy. Alternatively, the quest for the One Ring can proceed in earnest. Either way, it is a time for single minded determination: Win at all costs!

Finding the enemy

One of the problems with the end game is that there is so much map area that no player can actually see. This 'off map' territory is ripe for players to hide secret strongholds where they can regrow their nation and plot their revenge. Some of the more classic areas include Minhiriath for the Dark, or the east and south map edges for the Free. Once such a population center is raised to a major town, the nation will always have at least one secret 'backup capital' in case their main capital falls.

How do these population centers get built? If you will recall, the game only allows a fixed amount of population centers to be in play at any one time (commonly called the 'camp limit'). However, as a population center is destroyed, the game allows for a new population center to be built. This means that with coordination, some enemy camps can be destroyed with your (or your ally's) army while your emissary goes to work somewhere sneaky! Further, the map has a number of ruins marked on it at game start. Many players believe these ruins can always be camped regardless of whether the camp limit has been met. Finally, the clever player will have placed a few secret population centers into

play much earlier in the game, perhaps during the opening moves or mid-game.

Actually, Moria is a very decent population center for the Dark as it gets the Balrog and Fortifications! By placing a camp in such a region early in the game, a nation can easily begin slowly to build a nasty 'back up capital' (any population center, other than the capital, that is a major town or city). The difficulty for the opponent is finding where those hidden population centers lie. After all, you cannot fight what you cannot see.

Fortunately, the game gives each character type the ability to locate the enemy. Commanders and agents should go out to recon or scout off map areas. Careful teamwork with one's allies will quickly eliminate possible hideouts. Mages are also useful. By scrying (via palantir or spell) enemy major towns and cities, mages will learn where the enemy is hiding their other major towns and capitals. Further, they have spells that directly double as a Commander's recon ability. Emissaries can try to uncover secrets (585) on enemy major towns and cities. A successful 585 may reveal other major towns and cities of the enemy.

However, there are more subtle ways of locating your foe. Check for enemy activity in the Nation Messages. If you see that Murazor just had an encounter in the far north-west, it may be a good idea to focus energies in that direction. Use Locate Artifact and Character spells to track down known enemy operatives. Even spells 410 (Divine Allegiance Forces) and 419 (Divine Nation Forces) can be useful in this regard.

Eliminating the enemy

Many nations thrive only by selling product. By controlling the economy, a team can make it virtually impossible for an enemy to survive from certain market sales. A team should try to determine what the enemy is most likely hoarding in product (timber in forest, etc). At that point, it may be possible to flood the market with that product turn after turn, driving prices down. This tactic seems to work the best on timber, bronze, steel and mithril. To avoid having this tactic used against you, look for artifacts that allow access to the conjuring lists. Learning how to summon food or mounts can supply your nation with a renewable resource turn after turn.

Further, always look for ways to deny the enemy gold. Here are some quick and dirty tricks, some of which have been previously discussed:

- 1 - Sabotaging enemy stores to deny a nation gold.
- 2 - Steal gold from the enemy.
- 3 - Kidnapping enemy characters instead of assassinating them.
- 4 - 'Camp' in enemy capitals with high level agents, challengers and sickness/curse squads. This will keep the enemy from issuing capital orders. Mages and Agents are arguably best used to camp out on an enemy capital. This can completely shut down a nation's ability to function as a sickness/curse squad, or an agent squad, and continually prohibits the enemy from being able to issue any orders.
- 5 - Use emissaries to hit enemy camps (which typically have lower loyalty) to deny the enemy resources.
- 6 - Hit enemy population centers, especially fortified ones, with suicide armies of 100 or so troops. It will kill your commander, but it will stop the population center from contributing its resources to the nation. It also prevents many capital orders from being issued.
- 7 - Do not capture enemy population centers, but destroy them. This has two beneficial effects: first it denies the enemy the possibility of recapturing lost ground, and second it provides your armies the greatest morale and training boosts.

It is also important to control the battlefield. Nations should coordinate

Middle Earth PBM at a glance

Team-based fantasy wargame from Harlequin Games, with 'Lord of the Rings' setting. £10 for startup + 2 turns, further turns £3.90. Turnaround depends on the game, ranging from 1 to 3 weeks. There's a variety of scenarios available, with Battle of the Five Armies especially recommended for beginners.

themselves so they are sending in wave after wave of armies on a single enemy. This is a critical time to focus on one enemy nation at a time, and crush it completely. If a nation is not eliminated, then it can still contribute, re-establish itself, and seek revenge. By focusing on one enemy nation at a time, a team can bring the resources of the entire team to bear against a single foe. Few nations can withstand a coordinated attack... Be sure to bring as much power to an army as possible. Stack battle mages and artifacts in with the troops. Search out and recruit dragons. Many players forget that capturing or destroying an enemy population center causes other enemy population center loyalties to decrease. For that reason, consider avoiding threatening away population centers in the end game.

The One Ring

But what to do if you are on the ropes? Ahhhh... desperate times call for desperate measures. It is time to quest for the Ring! The One Ring is the ultimate victory condition and very difficult to track down. There are only a few ways to accomplish this, none of which are certain.

1 - Luck. Bilbo or Gollum carries the ring. It is possible, as a random encounter, to just bump into one of these two. If encountered, both have a fairly low challenge rating and can be easily killed. If they are carrying the ring, it may just fall into the hands of the challenger. If the challenger is an army commander, my experience is that the army commander will immediately lose the ring, and that it will be lost in either the hex of the challenge or in one of the six hexes surrounding the hex of the challenge.

2 - Skill. Only the highest level mages with the best skills in Locate Artifact True have any chance of finding the One Ring. In game 50, I had Saruman fail and he had a natural mage rank of 95 and an artifact-augmented rank of the high 100s (I did succeed on the second attempt). Consequently, it may be easier to actually locate Bilbo or Gollum by spells! If trying to locate the Ring, try Researching the Ring first. If successful, it seems your mage has a better chance of success with Locate Artifact True. Either way, once the ring is located, it is important to know that it 'moves' each turn as Gollum or Bilbo wanders about the map. If you can manage to get a character into the hex with the ring bearer, then the ring can be stolen or, as shown above, captured after successfully killing its bearer.

Once the Ring is secured, everyone in the game gets a message the Ring has been found. Rumor has it that an agent stealing the ring from Bilbo or Gollum will not result in this message ... Either way, the long march to Mount Doom begins. At this point, there is more Middle Earth Play By Mail legend that fact available. Some say that low level characters are less perverted by the power of the ring and have more of a chance to make it to Mount Doom. Others say that high level characters are more likely to be perverted by the ring and be taken out of the game, lost in their obsession with 'My Precious'! Either way, expect a blood bath at Mount Doom. Everyone and their mother and their mother's dog will be there. This is because *two* 990 (One Ring) orders must be issued on the *same* turn. Everyone will have a chance to prevent the orders from going off.

A ring victory ends the game and establishes your team as the supreme champions of Middle Earth.

Conclusion

MEPBM is wonderful game. It is so simple in its concept, but so complex in its execution. The rules are sometimes obscurely written, and like all good magics, much of the way things work has been lost to time and the mysteries of computer programming. However, the rules are not nearly as complex as are the nearly-infinite strategies and moves that players have to ponder turn after turn. The best players keep careful notes from each game of what works and what doesn't work. Some hoard this information like Denethor and his Palantir, others freely share what they have as if they were hobbits and it was their birthday. As a result, players should scour the internet for sites that may reveal more details about this fascinating game. Additionally, hopefully this series of articles has been useful to the novice as well as the master player.

This is a game where a player's skill in the game will rapidly improve with each scenario played. Good luck and Good Gaming!

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Read the rest at:

http://www.faraway.co.uk/tartarus/gamestories/2002_02_25_revelatiad/book1.html

Gen Con UK 2002

ALISON RIDER-HILL was there ...

At Olympia 2, London from Thursday, 28th Aug - Sunday, 1st Sept 2002.

What did you miss?

Two floors of CCGs; one of WotC games and one of non-WotC games (and if you want to know more, you will need to ask someone who was there - the last CCG I played was SIM City - or maybe FLUXX); one floor of Traders and demos - a really visual new Lord of the Rings Risk looks stunning, and I want to see the first set that has been painted up because that will be wonderful. (Maybe that could be a competition at next year's Gen Con Europe.)

And then, on the third floor, the games, administered by Raven for the first time, and providing a mixture of classic tabletop events, Living Environments, other shared environments and LARPS. In all there were more than 350 tables of role-playing in 30 systems with more than 50 scenarios available.

This year for the first time you could volunteer on line (and more than 100 volunteers and GMs took advantage of this opportunity) and you could pre-book and pay to play online and, again, nearly 1000 tickets to play were pre-ordered.

So what was actually on offer? Living Greyhawk, Living Force and Sarbreenar each offered a mix of events, each including an interactive, and the sight of Star Wars aliens wandering about on the Saturday morning before ten o'clock was new to the Gen Con experience. Some of Greyhawk's and Sarbreenar's best known players were to be seen in tunics and tights (multi coloured tights in one particular case), furry feet and a visual feast of colour and texture. It was possible to play in the Living Environments for the whole of Gen Con UK.

This year's Gen Con UK also saw a major development in the life of TSAR (The Stars are Right) a continuous shared campaign set in the 1920s in the universe of Cthulhu. This was their second outing and many new player's signed up for a mixture of terror and madness.

Millennium Moon, Epic Experience, and Tagent Bunny provided an alternative menu of Live Action visual delights, based in England and Venice, Medieval and 19th and 20th century, fantasy and horror and everything in between.

And then there was the 'classic' table top - well there was, but there was also the Team Fun - set in the realms of Bob the Builder and other children's TV favourites; and the semi-Live Action Paranoia - what happened after the players disappeared into Conference Room 1 is a matter of rumour and hearsay ...

The Open Competition was a three rounder set in Greyhawk, pre-dating the Temple of Elemental Evil, and Les Hedges was a very popular winner. Peter Adkison personally awarding the 1st prize of a trip to next year's Gen Con, the first at its new venue. There was a three round Call of Cthulhu competition for 'The Wilbur ... Plate'.

The Megadungeon, ten rounds of Hack(master) and slash in the Valley of the Tombs, continued to hit the heights and deaths were spectacular and numerous (over 500 characters died during Gen Con) and the coffers

role playing

of the heroes filled with treasure and armour. Also part of the

roleplaying programme but run on the Trade Floor was Isle of Woe. Sponsored by Hidden Fortress, this was one of only two opportunities for Living Greyhawk players to adventure in this dangerous and treacherous environment.

There were stories of cinematic quality action from the Star Wars and Star Trek tables; there was the Seventh Sea table that played from 1.00am until 7.00am. The players were basically drawn from the ranks of HM Navy and some of the more colourful quotes of the event were alleged to have started life during that game. For the protection of the innocent (readers) that is, I will say no more! This was after the Interservices competition won by - the Royal Navy.

Much of the post-Gen Con debate on the Raven website centres around a Greyhawk character who attempted to protect himself behind ... a ladder ... versus archers.

And then, of course, were the announcements about the future of Gen Con Europe. A revival of a former name to go with a move from August to April (in London) in 2003 and from London to Amsterdam in 2004. Peter Adkison introduced most of his US-based team to a lively meeting of sceptical gamers from all segments of the hobby. He explained something of the thinking behind the move and presided over a lively discussion.

If you were there, you will have your own kaleidoscope of memories. If you weren't there, do come next year - come to meet old friends, make new friends, play systems you know and those you don't and maybe find a way of adding PBM to the growing mix that is Gen Con Europe.....



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Raceplan

First one back buys the drinks!

DAVID BLAIR tries *Formula One Motor Racing* ...

LAST ISSUE the subject was horses - this time round we go a little faster, well quite a bit faster in fact.

Raceplan is a play by mail simulation of a Formula One Motor Racing season, wherein players control their very own F1 Grand Prix Team. The object of the exercise is to win the World Championship, whether it's the racing drivers or the constructors one. That is it: simple, huh? Well, no, as it turns out because without work you are going to be about as successful as today's Jordan team.

Raceplan works on a 2-weekly turnaround where each turn simulates one round in the championship, and takes place in exactly the same order as the schedule and circuits used by the real F1 circus. There are twelve teams in each game and each team enters two drivers for each Grand Prix. Strangely enough there are 13 teams in my particular set up, and 26 drivers, but there will be a good reason for it, I have no doubt.

The first part of the turn is the race, with development and testing to follow, and then it is on to practice and qualifying for positions for the next turn's race. This is done so you can look at the results of testing out a variety of pit stops, fuel consumption and brakes, in advance of entering your strategy for the following race.

The team

I took on the John Player Lotus Ford team and its two 'famous' drivers, Stefan Hakensson and Alberto Cataldo: the former comes from Sweden whilst Cataldo is Italian. Suffice to say they were not in contention

for the Drivers Championship nor the Constructor one, but it was a start.

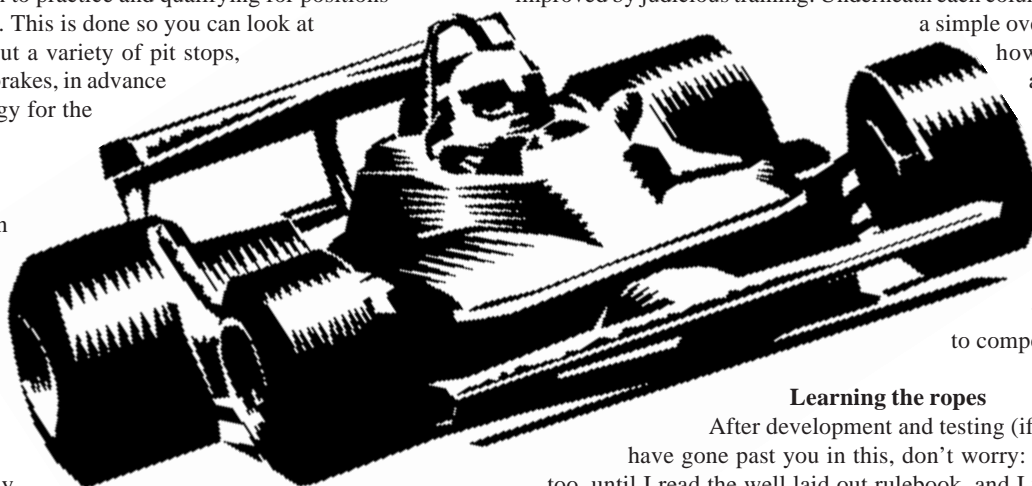
My turn sheets totalled around 15 pages what with current positioning, records etc which are sent to all new players in order to be able to catch up on what has happened so far - I joined with only four races left in the 16 race season. Normally a turn would be around 12 pages, all containing screeds of information relevant to my improving my poor setup.

The first task is to scout over my drivers and, more importantly, their cars. Each driver has a car, and in addition there usually is a test one and a spare chassis, working out at two cars each. Cataldo's statistics reveal he has nine potentials, meaning I can train this boy up on any or all of his skills a total of nine times before his potential peaks. The skills I could train up include his quickness to get away to a good start, his aggression in taking the chances when they present themselves, his basic racing speed, and his car control (very important when the rain is battering down). I am fortunate in that Cataldo is averaging 5 per skill which is just above average. Hakensson on the other hand has only five potentials, with skill

averages about the same as Cataldo. Both are new to the game, the latter is finishing his first season whilst the Swede is finishing his second year getting big money for driving fast. Driver's skills can be improved, and this usually takes place between seasons - each driver's potential rating is converted into improved skill as he gets older, but once his potential has reached zero his skills start to fade, though experience will still figure as a valuable commodity for any driver.

Next I look at the cars and their development. Cataldo's main car is the furthest advanced in terms of development, but it needs about three consecutive turns to fully test the new improvements that were ordered by my predecessor. Hakensson's is not too far behind in its figures but it is a close run thing, considering each car (and the spares) is rated in 7 major factors (Engine Power and Torque, High Speed Downforce, Low Speed Downforce, Gearbox Efficiency, Race Tyres, and Brake Efficiency). In addition there are 12 other minor specifications - all of which can be improved by judicious training. Underneath each column is a letter giving a simple overall assessment of

how good your cars are. I have 16 average, 2 poor and 1 good (Brakes). The two poor categories need instant attention to bring them up to at least be able to compete with the rest.



Learning the ropes

After development and testing (if some of the terms have gone past you in this, don't worry: they went past me too, until I read the well laid out rulebook, and I wondered what all the fuss was about). Practice and the task of qualifying are next carried out for the following race weekend. The recipe is simple: set as fast a time as you can in order to get a good grid position, then basically get to the front of the queue before the race starts. Ask Michael Schumacher: he seems to know how to do it! Having said that, it is suggested that if you are short on cash to improve anything, then spend it on the car and not the driver. The aforementioned Michael would be just another Jensen Button if he had not possessed the well tested and improved performance car that has serviced him so well up till now.

The qualifying setup involves your contenders driving on Friday and Saturday mornings, and another drive on Sunday morning. The turnsheet allows you to change some parameters for each attempt, such as the type of tyre or the amount of pit stops and how much fuel to carry etc. You get chances to change some of them and in the following printout you can see what worked and what didn't. The times for each of your laps is recorded along with your top speed, percentage of tyre wear and the average of your three practice laps. There is also the full list of the rows and qualifying times in order, showing which position on the grid each driver will start. In my last turn I discovered Cataldo was due to start in the seventh row, having qualified in the 14th best time out of 26, with Hakensson further back in 20th position: hardly a great start to my Grand Prix career, but there were only 4.08 seconds between first and last place in the qualifying times. You are then given the lengths of the straights and the corners with the estimated braking and speeding figures to assist.

Raceplan at a glance

Motor racing game from Ab Initio Games. The Advanced version costs £5 for rules, team set up and 2 turns, then £3 per turn. The basic version costs £2 per turn. Both versions offer discounts for bigger payments.

These figures are based on the real circuits so a real aficionado of the sport will probably recognise the racetrack from the statistics alone. Pieces of information are also given to assist you to make the fine tuning on what could be a memorable race for your driver. Information such as the loss of entry and exit from the pits is approximately 15 seconds. The adhesion of the track surface is average and uneven, and that tyre wear will be higher due to the circuit.

The race

On to the race itself, and the turnsheet will ask you for some figures such as what will be your maximum speed at the corners, the number of pit stops to either take on more fuel and/or to change tyres (you know what you did in practice so you just use your figures that suit the circuit and the car). There is also the chance to set your 'mood' - do you want the driver to take all chances and run the risk of coming off the track, or to be conservative and work on the theory that to keep close might result on moving up the table due to hotheads ahead of you taking the aforementioned chances?

All done? Right then - on to the piece de resistance - the race report.

This report will be up to four A4 pages long with every lap detailed and the action that went on inside the lap, culminating in a first to last order of drivers after every lap!

The race in question was the Japanese Grand Prix at Suzuka which has a 53 laps circuit. The length of a lap is 5.84km - a total of 309.52kms, and the conditions are cool and overcast. The first lap is when many things happen as drivers rush to the initial bend hoping to get a better position with which to attack the leaders, unless of course you happen to be the leader in which case your job is to stay out front. I won't give you the report on what did happen, suffice to say it took 21 lines to relate. However here is the report on lap 6 which should give you a flavour of the race in progress. Each driver is numbered and in reports his number then his name is always printed, so you can easily follow what is going on. I will omit the numbers and just give their names.

Robinson set new fastest lap 1m 45.313sec. Lopez passed Bernard on S(Straight)9. White passed Thomson on S9. Cataldo missed gear on S10 (brilliant!). Jordan missed gear on S1. Cagiano missed gear on S1. Sukov passed Miro on S1. Suzuki passed Cataldo on S1 (not surprising as Cataldo had just missed gear). Miro missed gear on S1. Cataldo locked up at T(Turn or corner)1 - just not his day at all! Lineker passed Hakensson on S8. Lopez passed Santini on S9. Hakensson overran at T2. Fairbrother suffered flat spotted tyre at T2.

Then follow the numbers of the drivers in order as they finish the lap: 23 2 (2.2) 16 (8.3) etc. 23, 2, 16, are the car driver numbers, the brackets are the seconds behind the car in front, so driver 2 (Mansell) is 2.2 seconds behind 23 (Robinson) at the end of lap 6, with 16 (Cagiano) a further 8.3 seconds behind Mansell. These figures are repeated all through the race, although every so often only the drivers' numbers are given at the lap conclusion and that can make more sense. For example, at the end of lap 48 the order was: 23 15 14 16 11 7 28 17 25 1 3 27 10 24 5 9 22 4 6. The well educated people out there will have spotted that only totals 19 drivers. Quite right, as Lineker dropped out on lap 23 with gearbox problems, Escurier went three laps later when he spun and stalled, to be followed by Belnard (lap 32), Mansell (35), Santini (38), Jordan (42), and on lap 46 we lost Fairbrother again with gearbox problems. The 19 left all finished the race and from starting 14th Cataldo managed to get into seventh spot, but out of the points unfortunately. Hakensson completed the race in 12th place (from a starting spot of 20th) so they improved their positions well without ever getting within striking distance of the runaway leader Steve Robinson (Green Honda) who came in 52.22 secs ahead of Willie Win (Jordans), followed in 3rd place by Iain Fraser (Arrows) 14.98 secs further back.

Points are awarded for finishing in first to sixth position, 10 for a first, then 6,4,3,2, and 1 point for the sixth slot. My sorry two have a career points total of 8 points. Cataldo has been fifth and sixth twice, whilst Hakensson has only a fifth to show for a season's work. Ah well, back to the drawing board. Both have been re-signed for next season as their potentials may yet be realised and we might actually win a race (both us and David Coulthard!)

Decisions, decisions

Towards the end of the season there is a spell called the 'silly season', so called because it is the time of the year when teams scrap over which drivers to sign for the next season. You have choices as to whether you wish to re-sign one or more of your drivers, make offers for some other team's driver or pursue some up and coming lad. Much will depend upon their wage demands and so there has to be a balance between ensuring the cash for having two drivers and for testing and developing the 'perfect' car. It is a fine balance as there are also options to hire designers (the higher the number, the better car you will eventually get) and sponsors (who in turn supply the cash for some of your investments).

A turn can take as long as you are prepared to spend on it, as with careful scrutiny of the figures and statistics offered you can certainly make obvious improvements in your players' performances.

The info

A payment of £5 gets you the rule books, team set up and first two turns. After that fees are £3 for a turn, £12 for 4 turns, and then £27 for 10 turns and £48 for 20. Discounts are also given if you play in more than one game. I have described the Raceplan Advanced - there is also Raceplan Grand Prix which is a cut down version of Advanced - fewer technical details and slightly less control over your moves, but it is cheaper at £2, £8, £18, and £32 for the number of turns above. Contact danny@pbmsports.com

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Ultima Online

A Real Computer Roleplaying Game

ROBERT HANSON *with the pros and cons of this famous game ...*

I THINK THAT when most people think of RPGs in general they tend to imagine a game where you must quest for some object or goal. This tends to be true in human-moderated games, and even more so when it comes to computer games. After all, can you imagine a computer game where there is no goal? Well, this is exactly what **Ultima Online** has achieved.

Ultima Online (UO) is a rich fantasy world that comes complete with all of the usual trappings of a good adventure: dark dungeons, thriving cities and magical monsters. On top of this there is a real economy, organizations, houses, ships, and items that have no other purpose than to decorate. I think it is this last set of items that makes UO seem so 'real' to people. After all, in what other game can you say, 'I own a castle'?

In UO, you first need to create your character, and here you have a lot of choices as well. There is no list of classes to choose from, instead there's a list of over 40 skills to master. So if you wish to play a warrior, you may choose to take up 'mace fighting' while a potential blacksmith will undoubtedly take up 'blacksmithing'. The wide range of skills also adds to UO's 'realness' by not only allowing the normal adventurer types, but also merchants, thieves and beggars. Let's take a look at some familiar 'classes' and explore them in UO terms.

Playing a warrior

Doesn't everyone want to be strong and able to slay the dragon with a mighty sword? Of course they do! In UO, the warrior will first need to specialize in a weapon type by studying swordsmanship, fencing, mace-fighting or archery. Each weapon class has a long list of weapons to go with it and some weapons have special abilities in the hands of a master. UO has made it possible for mace fighters to weaken an opponent quickly with smashing blows and a fencer to stun an opponent temporarily.

After selecting your weapon specialization, you must then think about other auxiliary skills to enhance your warrior. These include tactics to help to get the better of opponents in battle, anatomy to know how to cause the most damage, healing to heal wounds from battle, and parrying to use a shield effectively. Most warriors will study all of these skills, but only a few will ever master all of them.

All that is left is money. All warriors need some income to allow them to buy armor, weapons, bandages, potions and maybe a horse to carry them into battle. New warriors usually start their career as hunters, miners or lumberjacks. Any of these less than ideal careers not only helps new warriors gather a small nest egg by selling their goods in the cities, but also helps build skills and attributes they will eventually use as warriors. Hunting helps improve your combat skills, and the others all help make you stronger. In fact, most new warriors who already have a

source of other income will pursue these activities just for the purpose of training.

Playing a pacifist

UO isn't just about fighting and questing. Some players take up non-combative skills for several reasons. The main reason is to make money for their other characters. Each player can have five characters per 'shard' or server. As I mentioned before, adventuring isn't cheap, so most players will build a 'mule' character whose only purpose is to make items for the other characters as well as selling extra wares to other players. These skills include blacksmithing, mining, lumberjacking, tailoring, alchemy, carpentry, inscription and tinkering.

Others take up these skills just because they want to be merchants. These merchants may appear at various craft fairs in the cities, or maybe they will just sell their wares from their doorstep. Either way, their goal is to be known for their craft, and some of these characters have become famous because of the quality of their wares.

Being creative

You don't need to be a warrior, and you don't need to be a merchant. You can be whatever you can dream up. Perhaps you want to roleplay a bard, in which case buy a tambourine and travel the city streets singing your tunes and asking for tips. Or maybe you want to play the role of a priest, in which case you should stand in front of the largest banks and preach to the crowd as they make their deposits and withdrawals.

Joining a gang

It can be fun playing your role as a bard, and exploring the darkest dungeon, but it's even more fun if you go with friends. In UO there is a concept of guilds. Guilds are player-run organizations that can be started by anyone for a small fee, and can be created for any purpose you can dream up. As examples, let me run through a few of the thousands of guilds available and talk about their purpose.

ShadowClan Orcs: This 'guild' is really a tribe of roleplaying Orcs. They spend their days speaking Orcish, defending their fort, and scavenging for food and gold. This is a unique roleplaying guild as they never break character, and all members must go through the process of playing an Orc child to learn the language before they can become an Orc adult.

Defenders of Justice: The Defenders in contrast is a fairly close group with no real goals other than to 'be good each other'. This includes helping each other out, most notably new players. In fact, this was the first guild I joined. They helped me learn UO, introduced me to lots of other players, and helped me when I really needed it.

Temple of Mondain: The goal of this roleplaying group of warrior priests is to prepare for the coming of the evil Mondain of Ultima lore. There is no-one and nothing that they would allow to get in their way. Their exploits include sacrifices, a blockade of the largest city in the lands, and massive battles against the forces of good.

United Blacksmiths of Britannia: This guild of smiths is known for their honesty and quality of their goods. They offer members a suggested price list, and help in becoming a Grandmaster smith.

All of these guilds were created and are run by players. Their goals are their own choosing, and their membership is voluntary. Any player who creates a new guild gains the power of adding and removing members, naming the guild and declaring war against other guilds. So in essence their guild has absolutely no value unless there are other players that want to join the guild. It is therefore important that if you want to start

Ultima Online resources

If you are now thinking about trying it out, but aren't completely convinced, try out these sites. Ask other players if they like the game, ask them why they play.

Stratics: <http://uo.stratics.com/>

(Lots of forums separated by profession, server, and guild.)

Links to other online resources, including to most of the guilds I mentioned.

Ultima Online home page: <http://www.uo.com>

Defenders of Justice home page: <http://www.dojguild.org>

Temple of Mondain: <http://www.templeofmondain.com/>

United Blacksmiths of Britannia: <http://www.ubb.org/>

your own guild you need to be clear as to what its goal is, then start actively recruiting players to join it.

Being a Guild Master, though, is hard work. You need to keep the members active or else they might leave. You need to make guild activities fun or members will get bored and not show up for them. You need to have some reason for the guild to exist or members will get nothing out of the experience, and your membership will diminish. In essence the Guild Master is the president of a voluntary organization, and its success or failure will be a result of its management.

One of the abilities of the Guild Master is to declare war on another guild. A war between guilds must be agreed upon by both Guild Masters involved, and in many cases they will write up 'Rules of Engagement' for the war. The Rules of Engagement (RoE) usually include things that make the war fun, but not costly, such as a 'no-looting' rule where opposing forces will not steal from those that they have slain. The RoE is enforced by the guilds involved, so there is nothing stopping them from breaking a rule here or there. However, breaking the rules will usually give your guild a bad reputation, and you may find that other guilds will be less likely to have a war with your guild.

Guild wars are started because killing another player is a crime, and repeated offenders will be flagged as such. Being flagged as a murderer prevents you from entering certain parts of the game, and other players may kill you freely. Guild wars make it 'legal' to attack and kill members of a guild that you are at war with.

Guild wars allow players to act out epic battles of good versus evil, or just to see who is the better combatant.

Playing someone else

If you are like me, you end up getting bored with playing the same game for months on end. Sometimes you just need a change. With UO your change does not need to be a change in game, instead you can just change your character. Maybe you want to try your hand in a real roleplaying guild like the ShadowClan Orcs, or maybe you want to cause havoc and become a murderer. It's up to you: good or evil, warrior or pacifist, use your imagination and try something new.

Playing the game

One of the questions that I get often about UO is 'What is the objective?' This is probably the hardest question to answer because there is no good answer. The answer to the question I suppose would be the same as to the question 'What is the objective to life?'

The objective to life and UO are both of your design. Perhaps your objective is to manage the largest guild that any have seen, and claim your glory as its master. Perhaps you like the action of combat and make it your objective to explore the deepest level of every dungeon and defeat every creature you find. Maybe you just want to explore the role-playing aspect of the game by joining a long established guild devoted to role-playing. Or maybe you want to try it all.

There is no right or wrong, there is no single path for a player in UO, and there is no artificial game objective. How you play and what you do is up to you. This is one of the reasons I feel that so many have continued to play UO for years.

Of course there are 'artificial' scenarios run from time to time, but there is nothing forcing participation in them. These scenarios are often introduced to build a story behind the creation of new monsters or new items. The last such scenario included the invasion of several cities and the addition of several new creatures.

The 'real' review

Up to now I have painted a pretty picture of a perfect roleplaying world, but now we need to come back to earth and talk about realities. The reality is that UO is a computer game, and for that matter it is subscription based. To play, you first need to go out and buy the latest version of the game, which is called *Ultima Online - Lord Blackthorn's Revenge*. This latest version contains both the original 2D and the newer 3D version of the client software. It also contains some new creatures designed by well-known artist Todd McFarlane.

When I talk about 2D vs 3D, it isn't quite as some may imagine it.

The 2D version allows you to view the world from above with your character centered on the screen. The 3D version has the same view, although you can zoom in and view some extra character motions that don't show on the 2D version. In general the 3D version is a bit blocky, and I tend to favor the 2D version for most of my adventuring. The good news is that you can switch back and forth as needed; you don't need to use only one of them.

To play the game you not only need to buy the software, but you also need to purchase a subscription to play. At the time of this writing the cost of buying the software is about \$30 US, and a subscription is \$10 US per month. So it isn't all that expensive if you consider what many games cost.

Beyond the software and subscription you also need an Internet connection. I play using a 56K modem without any difficulties other than the occasional disconnect. Many times these disconnects happen at the worst times, like while I am fighting a very big monster. When your computer disconnects from the Internet your character does not, and will remain there motionless for five long minutes. So obviously some sort of 'always-on' connection to the Internet will prevent these situations, but the game is still very playable on a dial-up line.

Each time you log into the game it will connect you to the patch server, and will automatically download and install new patches if there are any available. The patches are fairly frequent and allow the game developers to introduce new items and new skills into the game. This is a strong point with UO because the game is always changing and new things are always being introduced. In the past this has included new house types, special awards for long time players, stuffed animal heads for decoration, and even plant seeds.

As a new player in the game, you have some major disadvantages. You don't know how to get around, you don't have much money, you don't have a house, and you have little skill. You can get around this by knowing someone in the game who has lots of gold and doesn't mind giving it away, or you can join a guild and hopefully they will show you how to make money quickly. But being new isn't always a bad thing, and many old-timers remember back blissfully when they lived on the streets, and how challenging everything was. Of course, there are others who want to be given everything, and not waste their time 'working' for it.

But is it worth the money? Is the game fun?

Recently I was talking to a newer player online and he asked how often I played. I explained that I didn't play as much as I used to, maybe only a few hours a week. His reply was 'I feel so sorry for you', as if a member of my family had died or something. That comment reminded me of when I started: when the "world" was new to me, I just couldn't get enough. So maybe it does get a little old after a while, but then again I have been playing for over three years, and can't imagine quitting the game altogether. I still find it very enjoyable when I do find time to play.

So yes, I think it is worth the money, and I have gotten many hours of enjoyment out of it. If you decide to try it out yourself, hopefully you will too.

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d20 and Dark Ages

GARY FORBIS describes new advances in table-top roleplaying systems ...



ONE OF THE local hobby shops here has shelves filled with unloved, out-of-print roleplaying games that just sit and collect dust until they finally meet their fate in a dumpster out back. Sometimes I flip through them just to see what kernels of wisdom the author felt merited publishing. Surprisingly,

in these neglected, misfit systems, I more often than not find hints of sheer genius. Unfortunately, because the rest of the setting and system is dull or poorly thought out, this shard of brilliance is lost to mainstream gamers. This is where the *d20* system really comes into its own. There are a lot of games out there being published by companies large and small. In fact at the time of this writing there have been over 700 products released under the *d20* license, according to Wizards of the Coast's website. Obviously, these are not all mainstream or profitable products, but they can still be mined for the genius they contain, and it will be fairly compatible with any other *d20* product you care to use.

This is why the *d20 Modern* book due on the shelves in early November excites me so much. From what I have read, the book is fairly generic, but is set up to be a modern-day fantasy game replete with arcane and divine spells and monsters from dragons to cave trolls. It sounds to me like *Shadowrun* without the implants and cyberspace, but the important part is that all these pieces are there and you can use only the parts that are appropriate for your game world. They are also releasing *Urban Arcana*, a setting book that will hopefully dispel that stereotype, and make for a truly interesting setting. I'm hoping that *d20 Modern* becomes like an updated *GURPS* - a basic system to which all kinds of people can add their own spark of genius.

The basic system still relies on classes and levels, but rather than being so tightly tied to your character concept as they are in *Dungeons & Dragons*, they are more generic. There is a hero class for each basic attribute, and you can mix and match these however you like. So your fighter-type can be a brawny warrior, a tough scrapper, or a wise tactician. Once the character has gained a couple of levels, the Advanced classes become available. These are classes like Soldier, Martial Artist, Scientist, and Negotiator. These are more specialized and tied to character concepts, but if none of them fit what you want to be, you can just keep gaining levels in Smart Hero or Charismatic hero and remain more of a generalist. Eventually, Prestige classes will become available in supplementary releases. These are even more specialized than the Advanced classes and will require even higher levels.

The system uses Hit Points, and while I personally might have preferred using the Vitality/Wound system introduced in *d20 Star Wars*, I don't think this will be a major sticking-point. Non-lethal damage either knocks you unconscious or it doesn't - there is no tracking of subdual damage. Personally, I really enjoy this change as I felt subdual added a lot of complication for little gain, although this is something that opinions differ greatly on. Of course all the rules for modern weapons that you might expect are there - automatic fire, burst fire, spraying an area, etc. If that isn't enough for you, one of the designers who worked on the book is also writing a book called *Ultramodern Firearms* that will cover hundreds of additional weapons, and different ammunition types.

Also worth noting is the money system. You don't have to track bank

accounts and credit cards - it is all built into the wealth system, which is essentially a measure of your buying power. If your purchasing power is sufficient, you can buy any number of inexpensive items without really impacting on this, but larger expenses like a car or a house will tighten your wallet a bit. Conversely, if you rob a Qwiky-mart or find a stash of gold in a basement, your wealth increases. This is another nice touch that really helps with record keeping.

Dungeons & Dragons is making the jump to modern day, and on the other side of the table White Wolf Game Studios is in the process of revamping (no pun intended) their *Dark Ages* line. Already out are *DA: Vampire* and *DA: Europe*, and coming soon are *DA: Mage* and *DA: Inquisitor*. What I have seen so far has really impressed me, and I can't wait to see what they do with the history and system of the Mage line in particular. In many ways, the *World of Darkness* is a polar opposite to *d20*. Where *d20* excels in, but is not limited to, combat heavy games, *Storyteller* specializes in atmosphere and character development. Logically then, where the DA line distinguishes itself is in the atmosphere and the setting, since the rules are pretty much the same as in any other *Storyteller* game.

DA: Vampire is set during the War of Princes, when vampire lords waged Braveheart-style war on each other. Naturally religion plays a large role, as does the established history of the various sects of vampires. Other than that, this book is basically for Vampire fans who are looking for some diversity. It does the job admirably, but there is little to recommend it to someone who doesn't already enjoy the *World of Darkness*.

The other line from White Wolf that I follow very closely is *Exalted*. The main lines that have been released so far are for the Solar Exalted and the Dragon-Blooded. These two groups represent the extremes of the power curve, but even the weakest Elemental Dragon stands comfortably above mortals. Also coming down the pipes are the Lunar Exalted, the Sidereal Exalted, and the Abyssals - corrupted Solars who are the living embodiment of death and destruction.

The history of this world begins when the Gods enlisted the aid of mankind to help them overthrow the Primordials, who preceded the Gods similarly to how the Titans came before the Olympian Gods. Like those Greek Gods, the divinities in *Exalted* are flawed and worried more about their own petty games and intrigues than in the state of the mortal realm. The realm was left in the capable hands of those mortals they had given great power to, and the Gods turned their backs. Everything was going fairly well, with the Solars ruling creation, when the Sidereal Exalted had a prophecy that indicated that the world was going down the wrong path and they must take drastic steps to change things. They used the Dragon-Blooded, or Terrestrial Exalted, to overthrow and kill all the Solars. Now, many hundreds of years later, the Solars are beginning to return to the world.

If I could recommend only one game for someone to try, *Exalted* would be it. It is very exciting and adventurous with plenty of combat potential for people who like that, but also with lots of character interaction and development for people who like to get a little more out of their games.

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Liberté

A Revolutionary Boardgame

PEVANS lays siege to the Bastille ...

Give me **Liberté**, or give me death!

Okay, that may be a bit excessive, given that *Liberté* is just a boardgame. And that its subject is the French, rather than the American, Revolution. The game attempts to simulate the chaos of revolutionary times, with different factions vying for control. (SPI did something similar - but more complicated - years ago with *The Russian Civil War*. How can you resist a game that includes Trotsky's armoured train? But I digress.) Designed by Martin Wallace, the game is published by his Manchester-based outfit, Warfrog.

Over the years, the quality of Warfrog's productions has got better and better. *Liberté* comes in a stout, slightly-bigger-than-A4 box with colour artwork. Inside is a solid board, showing a map of France divided into regions and provinces. The components are wooden blocks for the three factions (radicals in red, royalists in white and blue moderates), wooden markers for the players and two substantial decks of cards. All good, solid, quality stuff. Rules are provided in English, French and German, together with a couple of quick reference sheets.

The aim of the game is to accumulate victory points by having the most influence in the parties in government and opposition after each election. Players can also score points by winning battles or winning the election in specific provinces. However, the game can end early with a Red landslide or a White counter-revolution, in which case the winner is the player with the most resources of the appropriate faction. Assuming this doesn't happen, the game is played in four turns, each of which ends with an election. Depending on the number of players and just how the game goes, it can take between one and two hours to play.

The game is driven by the cards: these are personalities, clubs or events. Personalities represent major figures in the revolutionary period (Robespierre, Danton, Necker, Condé for example). Each personality card commands support for a particular faction - shown by a picture of 1-3 blocks of the appropriate colour - in a particular region - the background colour of the card shows this. Club cards (Jacobins, Girondins, for example) have 1 block of a particular colour, but can be applied to any region. Event cards allow the player to do something special: be nasty to other players! The most feared card is 'Terror', which allows the player to remove a stack of blocks from the board and guillotine an opponent's personality card.

To start the game, each player gets a hand of seven cards from the 'A' deck. The remaining cards from the 'A' deck are placed on top of the 'B'

deck. The top three cards are turned over: players can draw a face-up card (which is immediately replaced from the deck) or the top card from the deck. What players do is very simple: you can play a card or pick up a card (as long as you have less than nine in your hand). Or pass. Playing a personality or club card allows you to place the number of blocks in the colour shown into the region given on the card. The blocks can go into one province or several, can form new stacks or add to existing stacks. Provided there are no more than three stacks in a province, no stack contains more than three blocks and no player has more than one stack in a province. Placing one of the player's markers on top of the stack indicates ownership.

Once played, a personality or club card can be discarded or left face-up in front of the player. Each player is limited to four cards in their display - five if one of them is a 'sans culottes' radical (a symbol on the card shows this). These can be used later to break ties. If not used up, they go back into a player's hand at the end of the turn. But they don't count against the number of cards in your hand in the meantime. An event card is played with a personality or club card and can take effect before or after you place block(s).

Players continue until the blocks of one faction run out. Any player who hasn't already had a go this round still gets to play and then it's time for the election. Each province in turn gets to vote. The tallest stack in the province indicates which faction is voted for (the faction's marker is moved up on the election track) and the owning player gets the credit (a block from the stack). (Paris is special: the faction and player get as many votes as the highest stack!) In the case of a tie, the players involved have the chance

to win by sacrificing a personality or club card of the appropriate faction from their display. If the tie is broken, the faction and player get the vote; otherwise it's wasted. The faction with the most votes forms the government and the player with the most (and second most) blocks of that colour in front of them score points. The faction with the second most votes is the opposition and the player with the most blocks of that colour also scores points. Any ties can be broken with personalities of the appropriate faction.

These are the basics of the game and you can already see some of the tactics. You have to be aware which faction is likely to win the election and how much of a stake you have in that faction. This will depend on the cards in your hand, of course. Here you have to decide whether to build up your hand first or to get in early with the cards you already have. It's useful to have multiple cards for the same faction in the same region as this allows you to reinforce a position. But it also limits you. Because they're not specific to a region, Club cards are very useful as reinforcements. As blocks remain on the board between turns, you can build up a powerful presence in a region. Especially if you retain the appropriate personality in your display and get to play them again the following turn.

The various wrinkles add to the game and the tactics. First are the battles. Some Personality and Club cards have a cannon in the corner. When playing one of these cards, you can place a marker in the battle box instead of blocks on the board. At the end of turns 2, 3 and 4 a battle



Liberté at a glance

This boardgame was designed by Martin Wallace and is published by Warfrog (843a Wilmslow Road, East Didsbury, Manchester M20 5WD). It is a boardgame for 3-6 players, aged 12+ and takes 1-2 hours to play. The game is readily available in UK games shops at around £28. Thanks to Warfrog for the review copy.

takes place. The player with the most markers in the battle box and a general (a personality wearing a plumed hat) in his display wins the battle and gains the victory points. If nobody wins the battle, a white block is placed on it (more on this later). Second are the victory points for four specific provinces. These go to the player whose stack wins the election in that province, regardless of faction, in turns 3 and 4. They are not many points, but they can give a very useful advantage (in general points are quite hard to come by - the scoring track only goes up to 20).

And then there are the different ways of ending the game. The radical landslide is quite straightforward. If the red votes go off the top of the scale (16) in any election, then the revolutionaries take over. Players add up the red blocks in front of them, the red blocks they control on the board, the red blocks on cards in their display and the red blocks on cards in their hand. The player with the most wins - victory points are irrelevant. The Royalist counter-revolution is rather different. For a start, it happens during play - during turns 3 and 4 only - and causes the game to end immediately. Various provinces on the board are labelled as 'CR'. If the white faction controls enough of these, the counter-revolution takes place. In this case, control means that the tallest stack in the province must be white blocks. Ties are not allowed. Plus any lost battles count as a white-controlled province. If the counter-revolution happens, players add up the white blocks they control on the board, white blocks on cards in their display and white blocks on cards in their hand. The player with the most wins - again, victory points are irrelevant.

The counter-revolution, in particular, adds another dimension to the game. If you have holdings in white, then it's something to think about. Though in a five or six-player game, one player is unlikely to be able to force a counter-revolution on their own. If you don't have many white cards or blocks, then you need to watch out. Is anyone else trying to set up a counter-revolution? Do you (and your fellow non-whites) need to protect any areas from a sudden influx of whites? Similarly, if a radical landslide looks likely, how much red do you have? Whose red holdings need to be taken down a bit? It adds quite a bit to the players' machinations.



There are quite a few subtleties to the game, too. The 'A' deck is predominantly blue, which makes it likely that the first couple of elections will return blue governments. The 'B' deck is overwhelmingly red, redressing the balance with blue, and later governments are almost bound to be radical (given the attrition in cards over previous turns). You will notice that white has little chance of winning an election: they can hold their own with the radicals in the 'A' deck, but are then overwhelmed in the 'B' deck. And then there are the event cards. They give opportunities to sabotage other players' positions - removing blocks as an alternative to placing blocks.

I really like this game. There's plenty of interaction between players, lots of decisions to take and the opportunity to follow your own strategy. Though the cards available limit your options. It seems to work well with any number of players - I haven't tried three. And it's fun.

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Boardgames ...

... and where to find out about them

PEVANS looks at information sources ...



I START WITH an interesting piece of news: Richard Breese is publishing a new game this year. Okay, it's probably not that interesting. However, anyone who's come across one of Richard's entertaining and idiosyncratic games will want to know about the latest addition to the series.

It all started with **Keyword** back in 1995. A game that was all about negotiating with the other players, jockeying for position to get one over

them and then suffering as they hit you somewhere else. The players were all trying to get their pieces onto the board - as villagers - get the lucrative jobs in the villages (brewer, blacksmith, that kind of thing) or stick to farming. Then each village had to elect a representative to the council in the town. Bad news: they wouldn't earn anything. Good news: they gave you a vote as to who to tax or which licence to withdraw this turn. The whole game is like this: checks and balances, negotiation and tit for tat. It is a terrific game.

A couple of years later (1998) we had **Keydom** (which, with a bit of development, became **Morgenland** from German publisher Hans im Glück and **Aladdin's Dragons** from Rio Grande in the USA). Later still, in 2000, **Keytown** appeared. Both games continued the theme of negotiation and were well-received. However, with high production standards (solid board, good wooden or thick cardboard pieces and original artwork that adds to the charm and atmosphere of the games) Richard only produces a few hundred copies of his games. After all, he doesn't want to bankrupt himself! This is a limited edition, handmade game and is why the news of its appearance will be greeted eagerly.

The new game this year we have **Keythedral** (the naming convention is getting a bit strained). The theme is that players are competing to provide the workers and materials to build a cathedral in Keytown. So they have to make sure that their workers aren't idle, that they can buy the right materials and so on. The game is in the same mould as the others in the series: strong on interaction and decision taking with a little luck thrown in. The game is for three-five players, takes 60-90 minutes to play and comes with rules in English and German. It is available direct from Richard at £22 or Euro 35 plus postage (per game: UK £4.50, Europe £6 / Euro 10, US £10, Australia £12). Payment is accepted in cash (sterling or Euro), sterling cheque (payable to Richard Breese) or via Paypal to rbreese@msn.com. Send your order to R&D Games, Field House, Avenue Road, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6UN.

You may be wondering how I get to hear about all this stuff. Well, I have a number of sources, but in this case I first saw the news in the latest edition of *Counter*. This is a fat, A5 booklet produced quarterly by a small editorial team and a lot of writers. The strapline is 'Boardgames Reviewed and Discussed' and it does just what it says on the tin. The magazine was set up in 1998 by Mike Clifford, Stuart Dagger and Alan How. All three had been involved in Mike Siggins's legendary *Sumo* and their aim was to continue the style of that publication. Thus *Counter* is stuffed with words: 88 pages (in the latest issue, number 18) in a small typeface and without a single illustration - except for the occasional advert.

This makes *Counter* something that I don't attempt to read in one go. After skimming through for news, it sits in my briefcase for a few weeks while I dip in to it. And there is plenty to dip into. At the heart of the magazine are reviews of recent games - 22 of them in the latest issue.

The reviewers are all enthusiastic games players with plenty of experience: British, American, European. The same crew - and many others - contribute to the letters page, commenting on the reviews and articles and discussing aspects of boardgames. The other articles can be about older games or general games-related topics - in issue 18 the articles includes pieces on teaching games, on how games end, an analysis of physical mechanisms in games and more.

Counter is a valuable and interesting publication that provides the reader with plenty of material. However, with a quarterly publication schedule, it is not a particularly timely news source. For up to date news, there is only one option: the internet. Here you will find a plethora of board games-related websites.

My favourite is Brett & Board (<http://www.brettboard.dk>). Run by a Dane, this is a site in English about German boardgames! Mik Svelløv is the genial editor and host. With a good command of both English and German (not to mention Danish), he is well placed to pick up the latest news from the German games publishers. This he reports in English - greatly to the benefit of us linguistically-challenged Brits and Yanks. As well as news, the site contains lots of useful reviews, links to other resources and so on. It is bright and cheerful to look at and easy to navigate.

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Overseas players welcome.

The other huge resource for board games fans is the Boardgame Geek: <http://www.boardgamegeek.com>. This is a monster of a site, which is basically a big database. Search for the game you're interested in and you'll find news, reviews, comments, discussion forums and links to other sites. Crucially, you'll also find rules translated into English for many games published in other languages. Also hosted on the Geek is the Strategy Gaming Society's Worldwide Gamers Database. This is a register of boardgames players around the world: if you're not on there already, register yourself.

Talking of discussion groups, there are plenty of those about. The best known is probably the newsgroup *rec.games.board* (there's also a *uk.games.board*). However, this attracts so much traffic, so little of which is interesting, that I tend to visit less than once in a blue moon. Spielfrieks (mis-spelling the German term for games hobbyists) is more focused and thus much more interesting: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/spielfrieks>. Many of the websites also include discussion forums or bulletin boards, but few seem to attract much traffic.

Other on-line games magazines include *The Games Journal*, produced by Greg Aleknevicius (a regular contributor to Counter as well): <http://www.thegamesjournal.com>. Produced monthly, this is the usual mixture of reviews and analysis articles. It is lent weight by Greg's authoritative approach. *Game Report Online* (<http://www.gamereport.com>) is the on-line version of Peter Sarrett's quarterly magazine, *The Game Report*. Peter is another man who knows what he's talking about, having been part of the scene for ages. The magazine still appears on paper, but the on-line version is more readily accessible from this side of the Atlantic. *Spotlight on Games* is Rick Heli's website and includes a selection of reviews, rules translations, errata and variants: <http://www.spotlightongames.com>.

All in the Game is Bruce Whitehill's regular newsletter at <http://www.thebiggamehunter.com> (follow the 'Newsletter' link). This has a slightly different slant, as Bruce is best known as a collector and expert on historical (rather than contemporary) games: *'The Big Game Hunter'*. This is something I dip into occasionally, rather than regularly, but there's usually something of interest in each issue. *About.com* has a range of useful resources and includes a board games section (<http://boardgames.about.com>), edited by Erik Arneson. I find that this has rather more of a commercial, rather than hobby, bias. Thus the website is more likely to be talking about Hasbro's latest than new titles from Germany.

Other sources of news and information are the various publishers' websites. Of course, each of these only covers their own games, but if you want to find out the latest from a particular company, that's the place to go. Of particular interest to us is Rio Grande Games, since they are the major source of English language editions of German games. Their site is at <http://www.riograndegames.com> and they produce a regular e-mail newsletter as well. And, finally, the online shops often have information about the games they sell - quite apart from giving you a good idea of what's on the shelves. Chief amongst these is Funagain (<http://www.funagain.com>), which has a lot of reviews (like Amazon they encourage customers to review the products). This is an American outfit, but they ship anywhere (and also handle US subscriptions to Counter).

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned any British websites in all of this. Well, there aren't very many. UK Gamers (<http://www.uk-gamerz.com>) covers all sorts of games (role-playing, live action, play by mail), including board games. But the site doesn't have very much on it: some reviews and some forums with no messages. My site has a few reviews on it too: <http://www.pevans.co.uk/Reviews>. Some of the UK shop sites contain useful information, particularly if you want to know what's available. Try Leisure Games (<http://www.leisuregames.com>), The Games Store (<http://www.tgs.co.uk>) or Spirit Games (<http://www.spiritgames.co.uk>) - there are plenty more.

Given the huge scope of the internet, I know there will be lots of sites that I have not included here. Simply because I've not come across them. So please do let me know what I've missed.



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Conventions

JOHN HARRINGTON *applauds the chance to get together ...*

I AM PLEASED to see that *Flagship* has started covering conventions in more detail because by coincidence I had intended to write about these orgies of games playing in the wake of another pleasurable week-end spent at *ManorCon* in glamorous Birmingham (West Midlands, not Alabama.) I know what you are thinking. Birmingham? Glamorous? Well, maybe not glamorous, but 'leafy' certainly; it's not every games convention, for instance, that has a croquet tournament. You might also be thinking 'what has a convention where people play games face to face got to do with play by mail zines?' and the answer is that the major UK boardgaming conventions (*RamsdenCon*, *TowerCon*, *BayCon*, *Beer & Pretzels*, *MasterCon*, *OxCon*, *ManorCon*, *StabCon* and *MidCon*) are largely organised and attended by people from the amateur postal gaming community. Don't get the idea that these cons are a closed shop though, because newcomers are most welcome. Here's a few pointers on what to expect if you attend your first convention.

Residential or non-residential?

I should clarify that a convention, as opposed to a 'meet', typically takes place over a full week-end (Friday evening to Sunday evening) and, almost invariably, accommodation is offered as part of the package. This is handy if, for instance, you live in London and don't fancy the eight-hour round-trip each day to attend *BayCon* down in Exeter. Generally conventions are either held in a hotel, where a discounted room rate is available to convention attendees, or in an educational establishment such as a boarding school or a university hall of residence. The hotel based cons cost more (typically about £35 a night for a shared room) but do offer some luxuries, such as en-suite bathrooms, bars that stay open past midnight and the omnipresent Corby trouser press in every room. Whilst it is nice to have the amenities of a hotel room you probably won't be spending more than seven hours a day in your room and six of those will be spent sleeping, so if you are on a tight budget then a university-based con might be your best bet. It is not essential to take the residential option; if you prefer you can commute to the con or arrange your own accommodation, but either way you will have to pay a convention fee (usually around £10) to cover the organisers' costs.

What sort of games are played?

In most cases the original raison d'être for the conventions was to host a Diplomacy tournament and of course the zine-based PBM hobby has long been centred around the classic game of negotiation and backstabbing. The very reason why Diplomacy came to be played so frequently by post was due to the difficulty in getting seven people together for the eight hours/days/weeks (delete as applicable) required for the typical game. However, just as zines have branched out to offer games other than Diplomacy, so the typical convention now features a staggeringly wide variety of games, often played by staggeringly wide gamers.

Each convention has its own character as regards the games on offer. *TowerCon* and *Beer & Pretzels* both have an almost equal mix of roleplaying games (RPGs), collectible card games (CCGs) and boardgames, with miniatures games also likely to be on show at the latter. At *StabCon* I understand you are more inclined to find a few people still pushing cardboard counters round a hexagonally gridded map than at other cons. *OxCon* and *MasterCon* predominantly exist to host Diplomacy tournaments though Settlers of Catan and 1830 (and its kin) are also likely to feature heavily. German style boardgames are the main fare at *RamsdenCon*, *BayCon*, *MidCon* and *ManorCon*, with the last two mentioned also hosting highly prestigious national (and occasionally international) Diplomacy tournaments. Tournaments? All sounds a bit competitive!

I would not like to give the impression that conventions are populated by competitive gamers straining every sinew to win a trophy. The only sinew-straining that normally goes on occurs when carrying a particularly large round of drinks back from the bar. The tournaments are there if you want to enter them and are not restricted to boardgames - croquet, darts, pool, Subutteo, treasure hunts and quizzes are often on offer - but equally if you just want to drift around looking for a pick-up game you may do so. In this respect UK cons are very different from the highly organised and commercial US cons such as *Origins* (reviewed last issue). Finding a place in a game is probably the most daunting aspect for the first time con attendee and I do feel some sort of 'buddy' system would get round this; although it is often possible to sign up for scheduled games, the general approach is to spot a group of people setting up a new game and ask if there is space for an extra player.

If you find yourself at a loose end for a while you can always repair to the bar where you'll usually find the hobby's Grand Old Men telling tales of huge poker pots won or lost at previous conventions. The social aspect of the cons should not be underestimated. Postal gaming zines have long featured non-gaming material such as letter columns in their pages and so chewing the fat in the bar - or better still over a £5 balti that would even satisfy the appetite of Mr Creosote - is a continuation of that ethos. Believe it or not postal games are one of the last things to get discussed, as the week-ends are really an opportunity to get stuck in to the face to face gaming experience. If you've been trying for years to get that eight-player 12-hour game of Civilization sorted, or you enjoy playing the latest German games hot from the massive *Essen* games festival, then you simply must give a games convention a try. In all likelihood it will be the most fun you'll have with your clothes on* all year. Further details are available online at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uk-con-news/> or within the pages of *Flagship*.

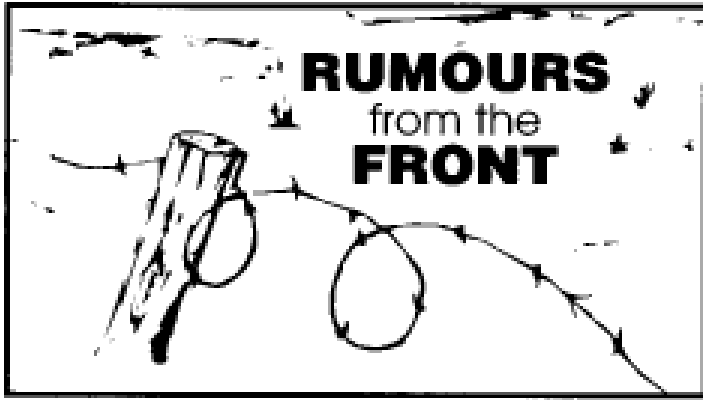
* Thank God!

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

Comments received after August 18th from the following ...

Mike Absolom, David Blair, Jason Brown, Lothar Feustel, Jim Kemeny, Andy Kendall, Anthony Mills, Ioannis Mitropoulos, Carol Mulholland, Robin Orman, Laertes Papaspyrou, Wayne, Wayne Yeadon, Allan Young

GAMES FEATURED THIS ISSUE

DungeonWorld (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'How quickly things fall to pieces. Ambushed by a triad of Mindreavers (nasty monsters that use mental powers to shield themselves and attack others), our group has been forced to make an undignified... er... "tactical retreat" to the stairs. Marcus D'Alembert and Mad Mat have successfully escaped, while Kara - our priestess - fell beneath the claws and tentacles of some Chelonian Horrors. As for Alamar... the judicious use of a Fade To Grey parchment has allowed him to temporarily escape the carnage - but returning will put him right back in the thick of things. To make a suicidal dash for safety or to look for another option? Only time will tell...

DungeonWorld - Broken Lands: The Halls of Stone and Iron have proved a welcome respite after the first two levels for Gaelan and company. Now nicely kitted out with magical armour, Gaelan has recently done some scouting down another flight of stairs into the fourth level of the Broken Lands, known as the Keldassi Flow. The boathouse and very deep lake that he can see look interesting... shame about the dozen Bufo Warriors in the way. Time for another 'tactical retreat'. Sigh.

DungeonWorld - Frontier: Thoroughly enjoying this spin-off module of DungeonWorld. After being hit on the head by a falling tree branch, Chunthalaka the tribal warrior comes round in the newly established bordertown of Freedom Rivers, with no memory of where he came from. Having teamed up with female ranger Anakine Oakheart (or "Nature-Girl", as Chunthalaka calls her), he's now busy trying to remember (or in my case, learn) how to survive in the jungle. Being poisoned by a dart from an Atemu Warrior isn't helping matters - I just hope it's not fatal!

Legends (Epicmail & Harlequin)

Jim Kemeny - 'Epicmail, the new US based Legends provider, has an innovative new module that should be of interest to players all over the world. It's called "Ruins of Rome", which comprises one province (so there is no movement) and is intended as a gentle introduction to Legends as well as a space where established players can experiment with startup designs, tactics and game strategy. Turns may be sent in daily and are only a dollar each.

The game has no factions or victory conditions and runs indefinitely. A lot is packed into the one province. Besides Rome and its guilds and markets, it has a coliseum complete with bloodthirsty throng where players can challenge one another, there are numerous lairs and a ruin, all containing various kinds of monsters, and some wandering legions to attack. There are characters to influence, and adventures to sign up for. There are also pre-designed startups to choose and a mentor system to help new players.

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

Middle Earth PBM (Harlequin)

Mike Absolom - 'Although wargaming is not my preference, it was inevitable that my love of all things Tolkein would draw me to MEPBM. Playing in two 1650 games (in for a penny, in for a pound), I have only good experiences to report so far. Turn fees may be on the high side, but you certainly get your money's worth with this one. Be aware however, that between-turn diplomacy can be excessively time consuming on occasion (at least for my tastes). Having said that, however, e-mail to coordinate those all-important orders, and web access to download the numerous player hint files, are vital for a novice player. It is worth noting, however, that a gunboat (no diplomacy) option is available for the more experienced gamer. Unreserved recommendation so far.'

Prometheus (Hunky Monkey)

Jason Brown - 'Knocked out of game 1 and I deserved it. Next time I'll know to go for a bigger land grab at the beginning of the game and not to trust my neighbours, even if they are less technologically advanced than my nation. Looking forward to the next game starting.'

Andy Kendall - 'Continuing merrily despite a few computer issues. Game 1 has a clear leader, and then a whole bunch about equal. The order limit restricts what can be done, so the large empires must plan more carefully. The limit works very well, and is suitably aggrieving - usually a sign that it's set about right. Each town each turn can be given a bonus, which usually throws planning out of the nearest window. Beneficial in one way, but it can ruin plans in other ways. Now if only I could tell the difference between East and West ...'

Total Conquest (Total Conquest) - playtesters comments

Laertes Papaspyrou - 'I've been playing Total Conquest literally from the moment it was first launched on the web. I was thus able to see its development step by step until the long anticipated commercial release. The potentials of the game were obvious from the beginning, but what I mostly appreciated was the continuous interaction between the GMs and the playtesters. This has resulted in a game that has been structured not only on the GMs' initial ideas, but also on the input of a huge number of playtesters, giving it a distinctive advantage that its every aspect has been filtered by a large number of people, providing the best possible outcome.

TC is not just another PBEM, but it comes to fill a noticeable gap in the fantasy games category. A quick browsing on the website and you will immediately realise the difference. Its philosophy is based on the idea that the player is not consumed by inputting meaningless command orders, but using an interactive applet he gives his orders directly to his units, production sites, heroes, etc. I was always being put off other games by the fact that after having thought my orders I would also have to input them... not though with TC's applet. The time you have to dedicate to plan your moves can vary significantly, allowing you to maintain your realm in difficult real life situations and perform detailed plans on more relaxed days. Beware, though, that the depth and breadth of your possible options can make you spend much more time than initially planned.

The feature I like most is the need to be continuously diplomatically active. In games of 30 players, even if you are the strongest realm, you have no chance if you don't have allies. These are not allies only by name... the level of co-operation between the allies is highly developed, allowing them to share information, production, armies, even whole provinces. The features of the website itself, help this greatly, by being

able to see who is online, send instant messages, discuss on private or public forums. Also, even though not a mandatory requirement, as far as the actual running of the game is concerned, role playing could spice up the game and I wish it weren't only on the players' initiative to make use of it. At least though the groundwork already has been put into place. If you decide to join though - stay away from my Realm. If you don't, someone is going to regret it, and this ain't gonna be me... grin!

Allan Young - 'A fantasy wargame evolved from PBEM, played through your browser, reported back to you in pdf. A game played with 29 other enemies or allies, on a map over 100 times larger than your startup size.

Total Conquest is a game where diplomacy dictates how long your kingdom survives. Your kingdom will grow and prosper in relation to how you govern and manage it. You must be careful, since you lay the brickwork of your kingdom's infrastructure, and you must foresee the demands and needs of the future: mistakes can be unforgiving. You must choose to raise, train and organize armies based on your potential enemies, allies, races available, the geography you think you will be fighting in, and many more factors. Your armies can fight by themselves, or along with another allied kingdoms armies. Heroes, special individuals who can cast magic or fight in duels, can lead your armies and rule provinces. Heroes can go questing to find powerful artifacts, gold, and other treasures to help benefit them or your kingdom. They can train, teach and learn skills, spells and experience.

Total Conquest is a game like none other. It is in the youth of a genre which will continuously grow and evolve as time goes on. If you like strategy, you will love Total Conquest.'

Ioannis Mitropoulos - 'Having played in a number of Total Conquest "beta" games, the impressions are certainly very positive. The game has strategic depth to provide for many hours of thought yet is simple enough for a turn to be completed pleasantly in an hour or so. The "applet" system for inputting orders is user-friendly and well designed and the only problem is that during the game testing it did not support the whole range of orders - something that is fixed in the present commercial version. The orders input procedure is so much better than the typical turn-based PBEM game, with all the numbers and data input, yet it is efficient, fast-moving and has certain elements of interaction (such as the mercenaries bidding and Instant Messages system) that keep players continuously involved. It is much richer than "map-less" games (such as 1000 AD) and yet simple and avoids unnecessary complications. I think most PBEM players who enjoy Tolkien's mythology will find it very interesting and it's certainly worth a try.'

Anthony Mills - 'So what do I like about the game? First of all, the degree of customisation. I can choose between four races, six cultures, and then give priorities to my kingdom for Economy, Army, Heroes, and King, ranging from A to D. The result ? Extremely unlikely that there will be a kingdom like yours in the same game! Second, there can be many ways to victory, no standard paths. Discussing the top five of game 7 some time ago I realised that one was there because he had an "all out war" strategy and his Dark culture gave him double the VPs, another because his good economy & diplomacy allowed him no wars but to sit back and build wonders, another still because he started the game with a very good complement of Heroes and was sending them to quests every turn... I love that in games, you can choose what fits you best, make the start-up kingdom you would love to play, and still have chances to be among the first if you play good.

In addition Total Conquest is the first "customer driven" game that I have seen, at least to such degree. Most of what the playtesters wanted the DMs have implemented, partly the reason the playtesting lasted for so long. On the down side however there are still bugs in the game, which can be annoying, especially when you are dying for a good turn, but even these are getting less and less every time. To cut a long story short, even though I know the game is far from perfect, I do somehow have the feeling that Total Conquest is on its way to be a huge success one day, and I really want to be there when it happens!'

Quest GME (*KJC Games*)

Wayne Yeadon - 'This is getting complex (for me at least!) with all the plots that are going on, not just within alliances, but the game worlds themselves. It's quite a job keeping track of all leads and snippets of information gathered, I sometimes wonder how the GM himself copes with it all. Even alliance leaders seem to be wilting under the pressure. Not that this makes for a bad game, as it certainly doesn't. It's just more complex than we were ever used to in Quest.

Playing the game itself without all the moderated aspects keeps throwing up new surprises, with new tougher monsters and character classes as well as party tactics to explore. Do you play to battle monsters or other player controlled parties? Seems that it is difficult to do both effectively.

With an increase in rank for most alliances due soon as well as other games improvements, Quest GME is heading for better things and probably more headaches from the complexity of it all. I'm glad I didn't take on the alliance leadership role I was offered. Phew.'

POWER GAMES

Primvs Inters Pares (*Interesting Times*)

Mike Absolom - 'I am beginning to wonder whether this game is something of a "missed opportunity". A game of grand scope and great depth, riven by dissension and division, and hamstrung by a small player base. And a game in which a dangerous precedence has been set: the deliberate and coordinated hounding out of opponents. And yes, whilst I accept that such actions behave a robust political game, it is MHO that these uncharitable activities will ultimately prove detrimental to the longevity of the game.

Thus, a game where you either need to be thick skinned, servant to the ruling clique or forgo a political career entirely. Currently, albeit partially because I have insufficient time to dedicate to this game, but equally because I don't want to become the target of such uncharitable activities myself, I have chosen the latter. It's a life in the legions and upon the farm for me.

In response to Lee's rumours (last issue): It is my understanding that the e-mail forum is officially part of the game. If not, then how can IC legal actions be taken citing forum discussion? Indeed, such activity was a part motivator for one player quitting the game!'

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Einstein's Lot (*Ulaidh Games*)

Carol Mulholland - 'I've been running slowly with my orders in this game because of a busy summer, and it's been nice to have no deadlines to worry about. On the other hand, I've regretted not getting Chris Morris' well-written turns, which always come back promptly.

My character has escaped the spectral voices and serpents of rural Somerset (shiver), and is back in the city. But should she hurry to report her translation of an encoded inscription to the saturnine Dr Miles who first showed it to her? Or is it wiser to make friends where the jumpy chap in an anorak has led her - the flat of Dr Newton, who's surely not as absent-minded as she first appears?'

Saturnalia (*Mike Absolom's Area*)

Wayne - 'Well it has taken me over 20 years of playing but I have just finished turn 300 in Sat as Coup de Gra, a personal milestone for both my character and me. Indeed, it is even better to pass that milestone in the company of GM Mike Absolom, who has proven to me via the quality of turns that he is the most technically gifted wordsmith I have ever encountered as a GM. He writes intelligently, with complex plots and deep character detail, dropping veiled hints when and as needs be. In my opinion, his turns are better the majority of novels - written by so-called professional authors - I have read.

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rok@timewyrm.co.uk

www.timewyrm.co.uk

I am thoroughly engrossed by Mike's writing style and his skills as a GM. Mike took over my character when Jim Botten (another fantastic GM, sadly missed since he retired) finished up the Exile region a year or so ago, and has handled it and the world around it excellently. Mike has shown that he can take a powerful and complex character and provide plots, sub-plots and a living, breathing world that continues to challenge and astound me.

For example, my character is deep in the sub-realms of the God of Death (Renchu - who my character worships) and is on a mission to stop a major demon (the Lord of Ice - one of Renchu's own) from trying to upset the status quo on the both Plains of Death and the physical realm of Saturnalia. Befriended by a group of Bone Devils and a hunchbacked, but powerful, giant and along with a loyal ally who has rejected her god, Coup strives to foil this demon in any way possible - politically, socially, physically and/or mentally. After four turns of negotiation, comes a double cross, a sneak attack and a massive combat situation, which is potentially deadly. Heady stuff indeed.

Did I mention that this game is also free? Yes, Mike has returned his area of Saturnalia to 'part-time' status and thus there is a three-five week wait for turns. The game is also closed to new members, but I believe there is a waiting list if anyone wants to get involved.

In closing, I would like to thank Neil Packer, Simon Letts, Jim Botten, Mike Absolom and all the other Sat GMs who have GMed Coup De Gra because you all have made the 300 turns (and the minus 27 fame as well as the 'Most Evil Character in the Game' tag) thoroughly enjoyable. Thanks must also go to all the players who have been my allies, as well as all the players who were my enemies - you gave me the challenges and interest to keep my character going. Appreciated!

Crasimoff's World (*Crasiworld*)

Wayne - 'If you have a sense of Deja Vu please forgive me. It has taken me over 20 years of playing but I have just finished turn 200 in Crasimoff's World as The Creatures Champions, a personal milestone for both my characters and me. This milestone came just before the Saturnalian one, which is weird, because I have been playing CW slightly longer than I have Sat!

GM Andy Smith has been GMing my turns for well over ten years now and he has come to build up a rapport with me which I believe goes like this - "I'll throw you a curve ball and see how you deal with it!" Examples - Floaty mine type things in the sea, which don't explode, they turn your ship to stone and you sink immediately instead; Robotic golems who start off wanting to destroy you and then turn into your best friends; Giant crabs who want to eat you, then ending up adventuring with you; Demigods who, for a laugh, vomit magical (and powerful) magic mana over you, so much so you nearly drown; Massive cities that have been asleep for 40 years - and don't know it; Party members that turn into repressed sexual maniacs after hearing a song; An evil murderer who can jump from body to body and travel through dimensions; A town run by robotic golems who hate humans, so much so, that your party has to dress up as robots and collectively end up looking like the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz - and there's much much more.

All my years with Andy have seen his GM style grow and progress. He has added a welcome addition to his writing repertoire, that some GMs seem to overlook: humour - and lots of it. Although serious when it warrants it, a lot of Andy's comments are swathed with innuendo and running gags; some of my characters will never forget their song-induced sexual frenzy, which nearly lead to the downfall of my party, whilst in jokes about crabs, black padded loincloths and "big fat hairy birds" (think Harpies) abound. It's a refreshing change from most "serious" sword and sorcery games and well worth the £2.95 turn fee. That said, I have noticed the slow but steady incursion of "extra charges", which may vary in price from turn to turn. I will be keeping a watchful eye on this situation and monitor the situation and report back as and when necessary. Apart from that I'm blissfully happy with CW and Andy's GMing.'

Heroes of Olynthus (*Timewyrm*)

Jason Brown - 'Intrigue and paranoia predominate in this roleplaying game, at least for my Egyptian scribe character. I should know better by now than to give GM Colin Forbes enough rope to hang me! Other players seem to be concentrating on the more adventurous side of the game, wandering around the world fighting mythical beasts and discovering lost hoards of gold. I love the way world events continue on a higher level and we have to adapt to whatever the prevailing political climate might be.'

WAR GAMES

Feudal Lords: Right of Kings (*Last World Games, Timewyrm*)

David Blair - 'Joined this game after the last magazine. Bob McLain adopted me, placing me as the Baron of Argyle. He has been a father figure ever since (geddit!!) and shortly afterwards I became a pawn in his game to eliminate a player who was residing in Spain because Bob managed to exclude him from Scotland. So I was bundled off to Spain along with Bob's support, adding a few favours along the way, and we defeated the by now unhappy lad from his fief in Badajoz, where I now reside. Since then I have managed to exclude the player altogether with a crushing defeat, and also upset the Irish faction by accidentally waging war on one of their vassal states. Despite sorting it all out, I feel my days are numbered - I will be offered a one way ticket to a state in North Africa or else, I am sure. A good game (and I haven't mentioned anything about sieges, warships, Champions and tournaments, swearing fealties, tax rates, knights, archers, and townsmen etc). Colin Forbes is advertising a British version and I am in at the sharp end here too. So should you, if you like non fantasy wargames with diplomacy and intrigue.'

Medieval Diplomacy (*Age Games*)

David Blair - Just joined this free PbeM and after printing off the rule book and downloading the program, applied for a position. I got one (someone had pulled out before it started) and realised inside two turns I was being set up for a blitz. I will only last two more turns as three states are already inside my area, but on approaching the GM, I was given a fresh start in game 1.

Now controlling the Almohade Empire in North Africa this one is unmolested and I have lots of gold to catch up on troop buying. The map and program is simplicity itself and a genial GM, and free. The turn takes about 15 minutes but the diplomacy can (but not always) take a while using emails. What are you waiting for? - if you like medieval times with knights, fleets, men at arms, cavalry etc this is worth a look:

<http://www.agegames.com/mw/>

Murania (*Michael Havlis*)

Lothar Feustel - 'The game is a mixture between a real-time strategy game and a turn-based strategy game, set in a fantasy world. You start in a province without any buildings and, depending on what you've picked at the registration, different resources. So you have to build up your province as a base, which means conquering new provinces to gain access to new resources not present in your province. As you continue constructing different buildings you gain access to new units and also new buildings, increasing the range for what kind of strategy you want to play (or what kind of people you play). So you could strengthen mounted units and be regent of a civilization on horseback. Or are stout dwarven warriors in mithral chainmail more your thing? It all depends on you!

Then you have the strategic aspect. As battles are fought by initiative, a good plan for the conquest of additional provinces is crucial for success. But not only in wartime is a good strategy necessary to win: you will have to plan your alliances as you need strong partners to succeed.

The last aspect (and the most important in my opinion) is diplomacy. You will have to ask others to join your team or to declare war on a threatening orc clan from the mountains ... All this is done by private

email between the players. The only limit here is your imagination.

The time needed for the game varies. In the early turns you probably won't take longer than 30 to 60 minutes. As the game progresses, the time needed will increase. Actually it takes me 6 to 8 hours to get my orders ready (I'm playing in four different games at the moment!). Of course, the more time you take, the better your orders will be. But nevertheless, even with little time it shouldn't be a problem to make the orders ready in about one to two hours.

An advantage is the presence of tools to edit orders. The Murania Suite is always in development and a great help, as all relevant data is shown. As a downside some features aren't yet implemented, but Mike, our beloved gamemaster, works hard to finish the work. Action points and also weights aren't calculated at the moment, but it's only a question of time until this work is finished and the complete turn can be generated via the Murania Suite.

Starting a Murania game means a lot of work at first: you need to be familiar with the rules and the corresponding module you want to play. Be prepared to spend a week-end on this! If the thought doesn't discourage you, you should first start in a tutorial game, where your province already possesses some buildings and characters. This game will give you an idea of the 'real' module games.

Of course, it can be very frustrating when starting a new game if, by making a mistake in the early turns, the game is lost. Nevertheless, experienced PBM players will know what to do to get a good start. As a newbie, be prepared to learn from your mistakes in order to get better. Yes, this can be frustrating, but even this can be handled, as there exists an option to pray for a miracle by posting an article in the Murania newspaper. Maybe the gods will help you ...'

SCIENCE FICTION GAMES

Destiny (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Still amazed at how much there is to see in this new Madhouse game... One of my positions is poised to enter a new solar system (Crabb - home of one of the known alien races), and their interstellar journey has firmly convinced me to get a better ship before I do any more deep space travel. Time to see what mischief I can cause in this new area...

My second position is still firmly rooted in the Stansa system, assisting the efforts of Stellar Patrol. StarCop Josef Kain has been partnered with Gareth Macsen for ground patrol in the depths of High Earth's Undercity, whilst Alyx Webb takes over the captaincy of the "Hand of Chaos" in his absence for space patrol around High Earth orbit. Stellar Patrol, protecting Stansa from the scum of the universe...

The playtest has also just entered the "Second Phase" and we're promised loads of new goodies in the near future. Stay tuned...'

Destiny - Star Marines (Madhouse)

Robin Orman - 'Sadly, my initial Star Marine, Michael Kain, has fallen beneath the limitless hordes of Zul- sorry, Kztich - on the space station Damacles. It was a heroic last stand, but the nasty little critters overwhelmed the entire squad in the end. However, this is not the end! Kain's replacement, "Mad" Max Stone has just left the dropship on the colony planet Tariah and is ready for action. The Earth Central Government has recently lost all contact with the Tariah colonists and, fearing the worst, has sent in the marines. Our primary objective is to find out what's happened and protect any surviving colonists, but a secondary goal is to locate strange barrels with ECG markings for pickup. These barrels are not to be opened under any circumstances. Time to lock and load...'

Space Troopers (KJC Games)

Wayne Yeadon - 'Just when you start to get somewhere in this, you meet a setback that thwarts your progress. Or is it simply bad planning? The biggest problem seems to be travelling any distance from a Drop Zone

without having the Encrypt skill to resupply with. Big omission in the free game though, is not being able to hand items between squads when you are out on manoeuvres. Specialising squads is also made difficult unless you progress up the ranks and gain access to skills not normally available to that particular class type.

Working with fellow Corp members certainly adds to the fun of this game and the desire is strong to locate enemy Drop Zones for a whole heap of fighting. Would like to be able to transport to last known position before a Dust Off, though, as travelling all that way again just when things were hotting up, kind of takes the heat out of the situation and stunts progress. Good clean fun all the same.'

Star Fleet Warlord (Pagoda Games)

Robin Orman - 'EH6 - the UK vs. US team game. Clashes between the two sides are intensifying as the Coalition (US) make their bid for an early lead. The Hydrans (ultimately a doomed position, it's a matter of how long they can hold out) under my command are furiously repelling early invasion fleets from the Lyrans and Klingons, and are becoming heavily dependent on EP gifts from the other team members. My other position, the Kzinti, have just wiped out the WYN (an NPC race) and have seen their stock score leap up as a result. They're now busy securing their position, ready for another Lyran invasion, and wondering exactly where all the Eastern Klingon ships are...

In E16, a standard game, the stock value of the Corellis Cleaning Corporation is on the rise, after a sneak attack with a large, cloaked fleet wiped out the Hamsters of Doom corporation. The Hamsters were one of the highest-ranked corps previously, so their destruction has had quite an impact - that'll teach them to send raiders into my home sector! I'm now wondering where to send the ships of Corellis Cleaning next, as they "boldly go where no one has swept the floor!"

GAMES IN PLAYTEST

Clansmen - The Return (Mark Palin)

Wayne - 'It's back, it's in beta and it's looking better than ever - yes Clansmen has returned. I received a phone call from Mark Palin, who confirmed that he has now managed to get the computer part of Clansmen almost totally automated, allowing him to spend more time moderating the game. He also asked me if I would like to playtest it and I jumped at the chance.

Basically, from a player standpoint, it's still the same format - a mix-mod game with ten orders (three detailed, seven short) - but there is a list of new computer-generated commands to help you use up your shorter orders. All the usual races are there - elves, (normal and drow) dwarves, humans and goblins. I also believe that it will also be run exclusively by email, but I could be wrong.

To date my set up is in, the well-written and clear rulebook is read and I await my first turn with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation - Mark's GMing is stuff of legend! More news - turn round times, turn costs, turn details etc - as it happens!'

(Contributions welcomed for Flagship 100,
by November 14th.)

HALL OF FAME

SATURNALIA SOUTH

GM Mike Absolom announces: Heartiest congratulations to Wayne who has notched-up 300 turns with a single character - Coup De Gra. Having outlasted numerous GMs, and having travelled many a Saturnalia realm, his commitment to the game is worthy of recognition and mucho kudos. Here's to the next 300!'

Galactic View

THIS IS a list of (mostly) 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 <i>Spokesmen</i> or players' comments in <i>Rumours</i>).		
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: <i>only</i> 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, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMs		
We have begun to merge the UK and European listings. We have only included those European GMs whom we have heard from recently - if you are not listed then please get in touch!		
Additions: Briny En Garde!, Michael Halvis, King of Kings, Neutral Zone, Constantine Xanthis (+5)		
Deletions: Richard Burd, Cleopatra Computer Games (-2)		
Changes: Dark Wolf Games, Entertainment Plus More, Jade Enterprises, Lords of the Earth, Danny McConnell, Received Wisdom, Software Simulations, Viking Games		
Total: 173 active European & Web-based GMs (+3)		
A&D Entertainment , PO Box 108, Bacton, Stowmarket IP14 4RX	A&D	
WEB: Webmaster@faxbase2.demon.co.uk		
EM: www.faxbase2.demon.co.uk		
FAX: 01449 781916		
Absolom, Mike , 96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG	ABS	
EM: MAbsolom@aol.com		
Adams, David	ADA	
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote04/index.html		
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote10/index.html		
EM: davester@oz.net		
Adrian Aramaro	ARA	
WEB: www.geocities.com/orc_engarde/		
EM: adrian@aramaro.freeserve.co.uk		
Adventures by Mail , 100 Fuller Road, Albany NY 12203	ABM	
WEB: www.adventuresbymail.com		
EM: keith@adventuresbymail.com		
TEL: 518-489-2605 (8:30am to 4:00pm ET)		
FAX: 518-489-9151 (24 hours)		
Agema Publications , 3 Workop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA	AGM	
WEB: go.to/agema		
Andrews, Colin , 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG	AND	
Arnott, Steven ,	ARN	
WEB: www.sjasystems.co.uk/		
EM: g13@notreally.co.uk		
Apex Games , POB 56, Gravesend, Kent DA11 9LT	APE	
Baird, Phil	BAI	
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote11/index.html		
EM: phillipbaird@sprintmail.com		
Bartram, Giles	BAR	
WEB: www.penalva.net/~serge/centre_earth/ardcountries.html		
EM: centreearth@yahoo.co.uk		
Baylis, Chris , 67 Mynchens, Lee Chapel North, Basildon, Essex SS15 5EG	BAY	
Blarpo ,	BLA	
WEB: www.geocities.com/tomthecanadian/blarpo/		
EM: enagrde_gm@hotmail.com		
Boothroyd, Alex , 30 Sawyer Drive, Biddulp, Staffordshire, ST8 6SU	BOO	
EM: alex.boothroyd@virgin.net		
Brambley, Francis	BRA	
WEB: http://freespace.virgin.net/francis.brambley/ArkhamAdvertise.htm		
EM: francis.brambley@virgin.net		
Briny En Garde! (Terry Crook) ,	BRI	
WEB: www.brinyengarde.co.uk		
Burroughs, Martin , 15 New Earth St, Oldham OL4 5ES	BUO	
TEL: 0161 6261580		
Burrows, Pete , Buzzwack PBM , 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG	BUR	
WEB: www.buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk		
EM: pete@buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk		
TEL/FAX: 0115 9224901 (pre 10pm)		
Burrows, Martin , 47 Greenfield Terrace, Newbridge, Gwent NP1 4QY	BRR	
Bury, Chris , World Fictional Wrestling , 1A Chapel Terrace, Southend, Essex SS1 1EX	BRY	
Callan, David	CAL	
EM: gorlos@netcomuk.co.uk		
Camelot Games , 6 Liys-Y-Foel, Caernarvon, Gwynedd LL55 2LU	CAM	
Carter, Dave , Scorpiogames , 13 Liverpool Rd South, Burscough, Lancs L40 7SU	CAR	
EM: dtc@clara.net or injabreck@aol.com		
WEB: http://www.scorpiogames.co.uk		
Casey, Ashley , 16 Willow Grove, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 4HP	CAS	
WEB: www.ashcasey.co.uk		
EM: serpent@ashcasey.co.uk		

Clovenshield ,	
WEB: www.angelfire.com/realml/clovenshield/	
EM: realmspbem@yahoo.com	
Coeshaw, Mark , 10 Ellis Close, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8DW	
Coleman, Ian	
WEB: www.thera.org.uk/engarde.htm	
EM: ian.coleman@ukgateway.net	
Cooksey, Dave , 2 Pemerton Rd, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 5LW	
EM: dmcgames@aol.com	
Cooney, Pete	
WEB: www.cooneysite.com/starengarde	
Cooper, Quincy	
WEB: http://timeofhonor.com/	
EM: TimeofHonor@aol.com	
Cornuelle, Chris	
WEB: www.xmission.com/~bob/lote13	
EM: bobxmission.com	
Cozens, Richard , 16 Fox Close, Boston, Lincs PE21 8EE	
WEB: website: http://web.ukonline.co.uk/r.cozens	
EM: r.cozens@ukonline.co.uk	
Crasiworld , 4 Barleyfield, Clayton-Le-Woods, Preston, Lancs PR5 8JQ	
WEB: www.craseworld.com	
EM: andy@crasiworld.com	
TEL: (Andy Smith): 01722 334878 (credit card hotline)	
Crofts, Richard	
WEB: www.chariot.net.au/~duncelin/engarde.html	
EM: claudedelon@yahoo.com	
CSPP , Alfred-Buchererstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, Germany	
WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de	
EM: h.toff@cspp.com	
Cyclops PBM , 18 Knighton Road, Romford, Essex RM7 9BS	
Daredevil , 178 Hall Lane, Upminster, Essex RM14 1AT	
WEB: www.daredevil.f9.co.uk	
EM: daredevil@dareorders.f9.co.uk	
Dark Wolf Games , Suite 1, 47 Botanic Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1JJ	
WEB: www.darkwolf.ie	
EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie	
TEL: (Kain): 070 2099 WORG (9674), FAX: 0870 052 7521	
Dodd, Leslie	
WEB: www.lordsoftheearth.co.uk/lote42/index.htm	
EM: lords42gm@throneworld.com	
Dracs Games , 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP	
WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk	
EM: derek@dracsgames.co.uk	
TEL: (Derek Rainey): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)	
Dunks, Antony , Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey GY9 0SE	
WEB: www.sark.net/~sott	
EM: xott@sark.net	
TEL/FAX: 01481 832926	
Dunnigan, Colin ,	
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote02/index.html	
EM: ancarie@throneworld.com	
EFIFA	
WEB: www.geocities.com/emailffa/	
Efsic, Eddie	
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote20/index.html	
EM: eddieefsic@msn.com	
Entertainment Plus More Games , PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA	
WEB: www.epmgames.com	
EM: ag@epmgames.com	
EpicMail , PO Box 150721, Kingstown, VA 22315-0721, USA	
WEB: www.epicmail.com	
EM: info@epicmail.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: jjgibbons@faraway.co.uk	
WEB: http://www.faraway.co.uk/	
Flinton, Paul	
WEB: www.ganymeda.com/	
EM: lords8gm@throneworld.com	
Flying Buffalo	
WEB: http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/	
EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com	
Foster, J. Ten to Three , 75 Frensham Road, Southsea, Hants PO4 8AE	
Fritz, Alarik	
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote24/index.html	
EM: lords24@throneworld.com	
Fryer, Richard , 6 Flamingo Close, Wooseshill, Wokingham, Berks, HP11 1SL	
Fuel PBM , 48 Crest Gardens, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 9HD	
EM: jeremy@fuelpbm.co.uk	
TEL: 07980 334867 (8pm - 9pm, weekdays or weekends)	
Galactic Society Four , 1 Peter Coats, 31 Calside, Paisely, 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	

	Gillard, Trevor , WEB: http://horseguards.org/en_egarde.html EM: trevor.gillard@horseguards.org	
COE	Glover, Adrian , 4 Srevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG	GLO
COL	Great Game WEB: www.geocities.com/epochelipse/ EM: horrrifique@hotmail.com	GGA
COO	Guild of Blades WEB: www.guildofblades.com/interactive/1483/vw1/vw1.html EM: 1483@guildofblades.com	GOB
COO	Halvis, Michael , WEB: www.pbem.at/muranien	HAV
COP	Harlan, Thomas , WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords EM: thomash@throneworld.com	HAR
COR	Harlequin Games , 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP WEB: www.harlequingames.com AND www.middleearthgames.com EM: pbm@harlequingames.com TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-6.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only TEL: (Sam Roads): 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays) FAX: 029 2062 5532 any time	HAQ
COZ		
CRA	Hartwell, Eddie WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote07/index.html EM: Alliebeared@yahoo.com	HTW
CRO	Haynes, Nic , Flat 4, Brookfield Court, Victoria Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 4GJ EM: moonbiter@hotmail.com	HAY
CSP	Hightreet Internet Ltd. , Warrior Games, 11 Belgravia Mews, Shaw, Oldham, Lancs, OL7 7TB WEB: www.warriorgames.co.uk EM: info@warriorgames.co.uk TEL: (Paul Green): 0870 7459297	HSI
CYC	Helmising, Michael WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote23/index.html EM: lote23@core.com	HEL
DAR		
DRK	Hemsoft Computer Consultants , 54 Crelow Fields, Stithians, nr Truro TR3 7RE TEL: (Paul Hemmings): 01209 860116	HEM
	Hill, Adam , 16 Shawfield Close, Sutton Hill, Telford, Shrops., TF7 4BB EM: adamhill@cablenet.co.uk	HIL
	Hollindale, Adam , 113 Coronation Rd, Brimington, Chesterfield, Derby S43 1EY EM: psych-ent@mailcity.com	HOL
DOD	Hunky Monkey Games , 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS WEB: www.hunkymonkey.co.uk AND www.sjasystems.co.uk/karadon/ EM: ape@hunkymonkey.co.uk TEL / FAX (Tom Fyfe): 01392 420582 (4 - 8pm & weekends)	HKM
DRC	IB Postal Games , 90 Queen Elizabeth Way, Kirk Hallam, Ilkeston, Derbys DE7 4NT In Off the Post , PO Box 302, Halstead, Essex CO9 2LA EM: pbm@iotp.co.uk	IBG IOP
DUN	Incubus Designs , POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG WEB: www.incubusdesigns.co.uk EM: ingbus@globalnet.co.uk TEL: 01509 217957 FAX: 01509 558788	INC
DGN	Interesting Times , 10 Belmont Avenue, Barnet, London, EN4 9LJ WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk EM: startup@interesting-times.co.uk TEL: 07050 658383 FAX: 07050 658384	INT
EFI		
EFS		
	Jade Enterprises , 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB EM: jade.ent@ntlworld.com TEL: 020 83256507	JAD
EPM	Jenkins, Brian WEB: http://hijenks.com/engarde/ EM: engarde@hijenks.com	JEN
EPI	Kamikaze Games WEB: www.kamikazegames.com	KAM
EVA	Kelem Games , 7 Claverdon, Hanworth, Bracknell RG12 7YN WEB: www.kelem-games.com EM: kelemgames@hotmail.com	KEL
FAR	King of Kings , WEB: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/King_of_Kings/	KNG
FLI	KJC Games , FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL WEB: www.kjcgames.com EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com TEL: 01253 866345	KJC
FBI		
	Larsen, Morton WEB: www.pbem.dk EM: info@pbem.dk	LAR
FOS		
FRI	Lancaster, Thomas , 16A Stodart Road, Anerly, London, SE20 8ET Last World Games WEB: www.lastworldgames.com	LAN LWG
FRY		
FUE	Laughing Dog , 31 Leopold Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7NP TEL: (Sam Bennett): 01394 274452 (7-10pm weekdays)	LAU
GS4	Lindahl, Greg WEB: www.pbm.com/~lindahl/fchain.html EM: info@pbm.com	LIN
	Lyakhovskiy, Pavel WEB: www.klip.pbem.ru/ EM: klip_game@mail.ru	LYA
GBM	McConnell, Danny , Ab Initio Games, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ WEB: www.pbmsports.com EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net TEL: 020 8325 2448	McC

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

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

Martel, JJ
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/ote51/index.html
EM: siri@throneworld.com

Mattingly, David
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/ote25
EM: mattinglyd2@ucfs.edu

MiisL, Sandro Chiavuzzo
EM: chiavuzzo@knickerbockers.ch

Miles, Richard, 27 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

Murdoch, Neil
WEB: www.geocities.com/floodlissoccer/home.html
EM: darkbluesNo1@activemail.co.uk

Mystic Arena
WEB: www.mysticarena.com

Neutral Zone
WEB: www.neutral-zone-football-pbem.co.uk
EM: info@neutral-zone-football-pbem.co.uk
TEL: 01440 713124 (7pm - 9pm)

Nielsen, Lesley
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/ote24/index.html
EM: lords24gm@throneworld.com

Ninth Legion, The, 40 Hykeham Road, Lincoln LN6 8AB
EM: ghempsall@hotmail.com

Oates, Jason, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA
WEB: <http://freespace.virgin.net/jason.oates>
EM: jason.oates@virgin.net
TEL/FAX: 01305 251451

Olson, Steve
WEB: <http://hometown.aol.com/solsonesq/lords16/lords16.htm>
WEB: <http://hometown.aol.com/solsonesq/lords19/lords19.htm>
EM: solsonesq@aol.com

Olympia Games, 6 Sandy Ln, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3GS
EM: pbm.dexter@talk21.com
TEL/FAX: (Trevor Dexter): 0115 9436197

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

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

Patterson, Dean
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/ote05/index.html
EM: dpatterson@computertech.com

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

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

Premier Management
WEB: <http://pmf.cmgaming.com>

Professional Basketball League
WEB: www.geocities.com/tomyzr
EM: tomyzr@yahoo.com

Pure Fantasy Games, Portland House, Bolsover Buissness Park, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 6BH

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

Reality Racing, PO Box 100, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10
EM: help@realityracing.com
TEL: 01380 81819

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

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

Red Mohawk,
WEB: www.beermogul.com

Richardson, Stephen, Guardian Games, 51 Amersham Rise, Apsley, Nottingham NG8 5QN
EM: stephen@guardiansr.freesterve.co.uk

Rick, Gregory
WEB: <http://www.planetunreal.com/kh/engarde/>
EM: Gregory_Rick_Chadbourne@lotus.com

Robey, Chris, 27 Bowness Avenue, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8NF

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

MAD **SSV Klapf-Bachler OEG** Postfach 1205, A-8021, Graz, Austria
WEB: www.heldenwelt.com
EM: ssv-graz@aon.at

MAE **Sabre Games**, Mill Farm, West Lydford, Somerset TA11 7DA
EM: telbourn@hotmail.com

MAR **Scriven, David**, 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25, 1DJ
Seadogs & Darlings
WEB: <http://communities.msn.co.uk/seadogsanddarlings>
EM: seadogsanddarlings@hotmail.com

MAT **Seamer, Robin**, Houseboat Tamara, Windsor Road, Datchett, Berks SL3 9BS
SESL (Mark Creasy)
WEB: www.sesl.net
EM: sesl@ukonline.co.uk

MIS **Sevenstar Games**, 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ
WEB: www.sark.net/~xott/greensun.html
EM: greensun@nickel.globalnet.co.uk

SOV **Shore, Justin**, 2 Langport Road, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset BS23 1YR

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

MMJ **Smith, Russell**, Middleton Cottage, 7 Fennels Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1SL
EM: smith_russell@hotmail.com

MUR **Software Simulations**, Georgian House, Trinity St, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UB
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: peter@pbmsports.com

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

NEU **Spencer, Jerry**, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY
EM: jerry.spencer@liverpool.gov.uk

NIE **Sphinx O.E.**, PO Box 25020, GR-10026, Athens
EM: ireppas@softlab.ece.ntua.gr

TNL **Sporting Dreams**, PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB
WEB: www.sportingdreams.com
TEL: 01332 726376

OAT **Squibb, Geoff**, 108 Teddington Park Rd, Teddington, Middx TW11 8NE
EM: crusader@intonet.co.uk
TEL: 020 8287 2592

OLS **State of Mind Games**, 13 Balmoral Road, Didcot OX11 8TZ
WEB: www.stateofmindgames.co.uk/
EM: rob@stateofmindgames.co.uk

OLY **Stensson, Leif**,
EM: leif-pbmadmin@lysator.liu.se

STG **STS Games**, Nulsenstr. 17, 3184 Bad Muender, Germany
WEB: www.trangrad.com

PAG **Summit Soccer League**
WEB: www.summitsoccer.co.uk/
EM: summitsoccer@ntlworld.com

PAR **Supersonic Games**, PO Box 1812, Galston, KA4 8WA
EM: sam@austerlitz.co.uk
TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 821022; fax 01563 821006

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

PIN **Time Patterns**, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT
WEB: www.timepatterns.co.uk
EM: carol@timepatterns.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 01395 276632

PEG **Timewyrm**, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS
WEB: www.timewyrm.co.uk
EM: colin@timewyrm.co.uk
TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582

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

TZR **Trident Games** (Glyn Cary), 9 Trent Drive, Hucknall, Notts, NG15 6GR
EM: jeremy@fuelpbm.co.uk
TEL: 07980 334867 (8pm - 9pm, weekdays or weekends)

PFG **Turner, Daniel**, 5 Salthouse Road, Millom, Cumbria, LA18 5AD
EM: jodgers@aol.com
TEL: 01229 774664

QIR **Ulaidd Games**, 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF
EM: chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

REB **Ultra Sports**,
WEB: www.ultra-sports.com/
EM: iim@ultra-sports.com

RCW **Undying King Games**, 31 Littlemore Road, Oxford, OX4 3SS
WEB: www.ukg.co.uk
EM: info@ukg.co.uk
TEL: (Mo Holkar): 01865 452921

RED **Varela, Juan**,
WEB: <http://people.ne.mediaone.net/javar/intro.htm>
EM: javar@mediaone.ne

RIC **Verein der Freunde**,
WEB: www.eds-verein.de
EM: The_Weapon@gmx.de

RIC **Viking Games**, 38 Park Avenue, Hounslow, London TW3 2LX
EM: flerg@flergus.fsnet.co.uk

RBY

RZE

SSV **Viking Saga**
WEB: <http://oghma.tripod.com/vikingsaga.html>
EM: vikingsaga@egroups.com

SAB **Wayne** (Shambhala), 59 Kln Court, Newell Street, Poplar, London E14 7JP

WHS **White, Stephen**, PO Box 137, Burnley, Lancs BB10 2UG

WIG **Wightman, Mark**, 31 Churchill Avenue, Gilesgate, Durham DH1 1PX

WLL **Williams, Mark**,
WEB: www.geocities.com/Area51/station/5676/sat.html

WIL **Williams, Simon**, 8 Osier Close, Ely, Cambs CB7 4AY
WEB: www.chaostrail.co.uk AND www.ultimatetest.freestervers.com

WWG **WOW Games**,
WEB: <http://www.wow.pbemgame.com/>

WRI **Wright, Chris**, 10 Fosse Way, Wilby Way, Wellingborough, NN8 2LQ
EM: chris@strikeforce.fsbusiness.co.uk

XAN **Xanthis, Constantine**,
EM: exanthos@bellsouth.net

ZEN **Zen Games**, 25 Cromwell Road, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH12 2NW
EM: zengames@quista.net



Zine Listings

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

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

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

TDJ **Boris the Spider** (Email: prbolduc@aol.com)

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

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

TOT **Flights of Fancy**, Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freesterve.co.uk

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

TUR **Ode**, John Marsden, 91 Westwood Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9RS (Email: John@ode_online.net)

ULA **off-the-shelf**, Tom Howell, 365 Storm King Road, Port Angeles, WA 98363, USA (Email: off-the-shelfolympus.net)

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

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

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

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

VIK **Strangitude**, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wyld Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangezine@lineone.net)

WLL **To Win Just Once**, Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB10 8UP (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)

WWS **Underneath The Mango Tree**, Alex Bardy (Email: alex@mangozine.com)

WWS **Variable Pig**, Jim Reader, Vredelanstraat 20, 3633 EC, Vreeland, NETHERLANDS (Email: cj.reader@wanadoo.nl)

HOW TO READ THE GALACTIC VIEW TABLES

Process shows if the game is run by computer (C), human (H) or mixed (M). The **Duration** of the game is shown by O (Open-ended) or F (Finite).

GM is the GM's code shown in our listing of UK & Web-based firms.

Medium shows how much a game is available via email (e), paper (p) or web-based play (w). Language is also indicated here where a game is offered other than in English.

(C) German.

Start-up shows how much you will pay to begin playing the game. * indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see moderator for details).

Free Turns - many GMs will give you a number of free turns at the start of the game

Turn Fee - how much each turn costs. * means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. **S** means you need to send an SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage.

Other Fees - the following footnotes apply:(a) more for larger positions or later turns in the game, (b) more for battle reports, (c) more for extended orders/longer reports, (d) more for several possible extras, (e) lower cost if you join the club. **S** indicates no credit refunds available. (f) higher start-up fee for paper rules

Flagship Ref. shows the issue of Flagship where you can find the best description so far: a=arcrite, s=Spokenmen Speak, d=diary. Thus, 4s means 'Spokenmen 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.

New Entries: Adventurer's Guild, Briny En Garde!, King of Kings, Murania, Renaissance, Saturnalia NE (+16)

Deletions: Galactic Invasion 2, Postal American Football League, Saturnalia IV, Adventurers, Terrain III (-4)

Changes: Beyond Green Sun, Legends (Huteguin), Monsters, Neutral Zone, Star Quest

Total: 292 games (+2)

Note that all prices are generally for the UK and are given in £'s except where noted. Non-UK European players should note that rates are usually about 25% higher than for UK players. If in doubt, contact the GMs.

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
1483 Online	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	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
ABPW	H-O	Sport: Wrestling	BOO	p	£1.00	0	£1.00	-	92a
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£15.00	2	£4.00	-	-
Absolute Power 2	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	2	£5.00	-	-
Absolute Heroes	M-O	RFG: Supheroes	JAD	p	£15.00	2	£4.50	(b)	91a
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50	-	35a, 72-74d, 88a
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	LOC	e	*70 per game		-	-	35a, 72-74d, 88a
Adventurers Guild	C-O	Adventure	EPM	e	£10	0	£1.25	(a)	-
Aeroball	M-O	Sport: Fictional	WIG	p	£2.00	1	£1.25	-	62-63a
Agamemnon II	M-F	Wargame: Fantasy	KEL	p	£12.00	5	£3.00	-	76a
Alamaze	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	1	£3.50	-	71a, 80a
American Civil War Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGE	p	£6.40	0	£2.80	-	60s
American War of Ind. Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGE	p	£6.40	0	£2.80	-	78s
Ancient Empires	M-F	Power: Historical	OAT	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1 month	58a
Apex PBM Soccer	C-O	Sport: Soccer	APE	p	£1.50	0	£3.00 for 2 games	35a	-
Aspects of Empire	C-F	Sci-Fi	CSP	G only	?	?	?	-	98s
Aspects of Might	M-O	Adventure	SIL	e	£2.50	0	£2.50	(c)	94s
Assyria's End	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£5.00	(c)	90a
Atlantis	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	VAR	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	QIR	G only	?	?	?	-	-
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SIP	e, p	£10.00*	0	£3.75	(a)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SPH	e, p	?	?	?	(a)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SSV	e, p, G	?	?	?	-	34s, 96a
Away the Lads	M-O	Sport: Soccer	DRC	e, p	Free	0	£2.40	(a)	42s
Bakufu	H-F	RFG: Fantasy	DRK	p	£36 per game	?	£2.50	-	-
Barbarians at the Gate	C-O	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	?	£2.50	-	-
Barony of the Rivers	H-O	RFG: Fantasy	HIL	p	£10.00	3	-	-	-
Basketball	C-O	Sport:Basketball	CAM	p	£10 per season		-	-	-
Battle Plan	C-O	Wargame	FBI	e	Free	0	£3.50	(a)	19a
Battle Robots	C-F	Misc: Robots	GSF	e	Free	0	Free	-	85a
Beer Mogul	C-O	Economic	RED	w	Free	0	Free	-	96a
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£9.95	3	£2.95	(a)	86a
Beyond Green Sun	M-O	Sci Fi	SEV	e, p	Free	0	£2.50 - £3.00	-	87a
Beyond the Stellar Empire	M-O	Sci Fi	KJC	p	Free	1	£2.50 - £6.00	-	22a, 83a
Bleddin Diary, A	H-O	Tribal	SPE	e, p	£7.50	2	£2.25 - £3.25	\$	80a, 81-84d
British Wrestling Association	M-O	Sport: Wrestling	TUR	p	£7.00	6	£1.00	-	57a, 92a
Centre-Earth	H-O	Power: Fantasy	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	SUP	p	Free	0	£1.95	-	53s
Chaos Trail	H-O	Sport: Soccer	WIL	p	Free	0	£1.25 S	(d)	47a, 86a
Chicken Run	H-O	Sport: Motor Racing	RCW	e, p	£0.50	0	£0.50	-	-
Clans II	C-O	Tribal	HSI	e, p	Free	4	£3.50	-	38a, 84a
Clovenshield	C-O	RFG: Fantasy	CLO	e	Free	-	Free	-	93a
Coeshaw Postal Football League	M-O	Sport: Soccer	COE	p	Free	0	£1.50	(d)	70s
Come On You Reds	M-F	Sport: Soccer	CAM	e, p	£1.00	1	£1.00	-	34a, 41a
Company Commander	M-F	Wargame	OAT	e, p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month	-	96a, 97a
Conclave	M-F	Power: Fantasy	UKG	e, p	£10.00	2	£4.50	-	91s, 96a
Continental Rails	C-F	Misc: Railway	FUE	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.25	-	21a
Covert Operations	C-F	Economic	FBI	e	\$25 per game	0	n/a	-	-
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Tribal	HAQ	p	£10.00	1	£4.50	(d)	96a
Crisis!	M-O	Tribal	CRA	p	£9.95	2	£2.50	-	7a
Crisis! * Quest World	C-F	Wargame	TM	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.20*	-	85a
Dark Age II	C-F	Power: Historical	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 3	-	51a
Diadochi	H-F	Wargame: Historical	CYC	p	£5.00	2	£2.50	-	78a, 79d, 81d
Directive 32	M-F	Wargame: Historical	TIW	p	£10.00	1	?	-	-
Dragonhelm	C-F	Sci Fi	COZ	p	£10.00	0	£6.00	-	73s
Domination	M-F	Wargame: Fantasy	w	Free	-	Free	-	-	-
DungonWorld	C-O	RFG: Fantasy	ULA	e, p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	79a
Eagle	H-F	Adventure	MAD	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	(d)	77-80d, 92-94d
		Wargame: Historical	SAB	p	£10	1	£10.00 for 3	-	-

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
EHFA	C-O	Sport: Soccer	EHF	w	Free	0	Free	-	94s
EG: Banana	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	BAN	e	Free	0	Free	-	96a
EG: Blarpo	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	BLA	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
EG: Briny	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	BRI	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
EG: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	SPN	p	£5.00	5	£0.80	-	84s, 93a
EG: Delon	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	CRO	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a, 96a
EG: Horeguards	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	COL	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	94s
EG: King & Cardinal	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	GIL	e, w	Free	-	Free	-	93a
EG: LPBS	M-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	EVA	p	£10.00	4	£2.00	-	34a, 93a
EG: Ore	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	ARA	e, w	Free	-	-	-	93a
EG: Orleans	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	JEN	e	Free	-	-	-	93a
EG: Slumbers	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	BRM	e, w	Free	-	-	-	93a
EG: Star	H-O	RFG: Sci-Fi (EG)	COO	e	Free	0	Free	-	93a, 96a
Einstein's Lot	H-O	RFG: Historical (EG)	ULA	p	£4.50	1	£3.50	-	91a
El Mythico	C-F	Wargame: Modern	TDG	P only	?	?	4 Euro	-	-
Eldritch	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	PEG	e	Free	2	\$2	-	74s, 91s
Election Year	C-F	Misc: Political	FBI	e	Free	0	£2.00	-	-
Empires	C-O	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	?	£2.00	-	63s
Empires of Corinnum	M-O	Power: Fantasy	VIK	e, p	Free	0	£4.00	-	-
Endless Time and Space	H-F	Sci Fi	SAB	p	Free	0	£10.00 for 2	-	78s
English Civil War Battles	M-F	Wargame: Historical	AGE	p	£6.40	0	£2.80	-	63a
Epoch of Might	M-O	RFG: Fantasy	DRK	e, p	£10.00	2	£3.00	-	98a
Eposm	H-O	Sport: Horse-Racing	SCR	p	£6.00	3	£2.10	-	-
Evolution of the Stars	C-F	Sci-Fi	VdF	e	TBA	0	*0.5	(e)	-
Extra Time-Chairman	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KIC	p	Free	1	£2.25	-	53a
Extra Time-original	C-O	Sport: Soccer	KIC/CRA	e, p	Free	1	£1.90	-	53a
Falcon	M-F	Wargame: Historical	SAB	p	£10.00	1	£10.00 for 3	-	-
Fall of the Roman Empire	M-F	Wargame: Historical	OAT	e, p	£3.00	0	£2.00	-	-78s
Fillen at the First	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRC	e, p	Free	0	Free	-	-
Fantasy Cycling 2001	C-O	Sport: Cycling	ULC	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Fantasy Soccer	C-O	Sport: Soccer	FBI	e	Free	0	£1.50	-	53a
Feudal Lords	C-F	Wargame: Historical	LWG	e	\$5	0	£3.50	-	3a
Feudal Lords: Right of Kings	C-F	Wargame: Historical	LWG	e	\$5	0	\$1	-	-
Feudal Lords: Right of Kings	C-F	Wargame: Historical	TIW	e, p	£5	0	£2	(f)	-
First Crusade	C-F	Wargame: Historical	KEL	p	£10.00	5	£2.00	-	38a
Football Soccer	M-O	Sport: Soccer	FLO	w, e	Free	0	Free	-	93s
Food Chain	C-O	Misc	LIN	w	Free	0	Free	-	-
Football Maestro	C-O	Sport: Soccer	MAE	p	Free	0	£2.00	-	84a
Football Predictions	C-O	Sport: Soccer	DRC	w	Free	0	Free	-	-
For God, King & Country	H-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£0.80	0	£5.00	-	46s
Fussball-Liga	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SSV	G only	?	?	0.75 Euro	-	-
Galactic Conflict	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$3.50	-	\$5
Galactic Empires	C-F	Sci-Fi	MMJ	e	Free	5	\$2.25	-	-
Galactic Invasion 3	C-F	Sci Fi	ARN	e	Free	-	Free	-	-
Galaxy	C-F	Sci-Fi	REB	e, p	Free	6	£1.50	-	94s
Ganeplan	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£11.00 for 4	-	20a
Ganeplan Baseball	C-O	Sport: Baseball	McC	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	-	-
Ganeplan Boxing	C-O	Sport: Boxing	McC	p	£5.00	5	\$9.00 for 4	-	-
Ganeplan: Advanced	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOF/McC	p	£5.00	0	£13.00 for 4	-	-
Gobball	C-O	Sport: Fictional	SYN	p	£7.70	2	£3.00	-	79s
Godfather	C-F	Misc: Crime	PAG	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	(a)	73a, 83d
Gorlos	C-O	Misc: Crime	LOC	e	Free	0	4 Euro	-	73a, 83d
Grand National	M-O	Wargame: Fantasy	CAL	e	Free	0	Free	-	65a
Great Game: 1820	H-F	Sport: Horse Racing	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.75	-	38a
Great White Hunter	C-F	Wargame: Historical	GGa	e	Free	-	Free	-	96s
Gridiron Stats	C-O	Misc	ARN	e	Free	-	Free	-	94s
Gryphon	C-O	Sport: American Football	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	-
Guardian	H-F	Power: Historical	SAB	p	£10.00	1	£10.00 for 3	-	-
Gumbout Diplomacy	M-O	RFG: Fantasy	RIC	p	£10.00	2	£2.00	(c)	53s
Haunted Manor	C-F	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	0	£5.00	-	-
Heavens Above	C-F	Adventure	MAD	w, p	Free	0	Free	-	97a
Heldenwelt	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	FUE	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.25	-	48a, 61a
Herods of Olynthus	H-O	Adventure	SSV	G only	?	?	6.9 Euro/month	-	-
Heroic Fantasy	C-O	RFG: Fantasy	TIW	e, p	£10.00	0	£3.00	-	88s
Hooplans	C-O	Adventure	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$3	-	40a
Horse Racing	C-O	Sport: Horse Racing	REA	p	£5.00	2	£3.25	-	-
In Off the Post	C-O	Sport: Soccer	IOP	p	Choice	0	£1.25	(d)	71s
In The House Today	H-F	Misc: Politics	SAB	p	Free	1	£2.25	(d)	33a
Iron Kings	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	PEG	e	Free	2	\$2	-	-
It's a Crime!	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	ABM	p	TBA	TBA	TBA	-	-
It's a Crime!	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	KIC	p	Free	2	£1.85	-	-
It's a Crime! in the Net	C-F	Misc: Crime	ABM	p	Free	2	£1.50	-	-
JWA Wrestling	M-O	Sport: Wrestling	WPL	p	£1.00	0	£1.00	-	65a
Kickabout	C-O	Sport: Soccer	FRY	p	£1.50	0	£1.50	-	-
King of Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	SFE	e, p	£7.50	2	£2.25	-	18a, 34a, 89a
Kings of Steel	H-F	Wargame: Fantasy	KNG	e, p	Free	-	Free	-	-
KLIP	C-O	Economic	WHS	p	£5.00	1	£2.50	-	13a, 77a
Ksar Exo	H-F	Power: Historical	SAB	p	£10.00	?	?	-	89s
La Gloire du Roi	C-F	Wargame: Robotic	TDJ	e, p	?	1	£10.00 for 2	-	-
La Ultima Cruzada	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	0	£2 or 3 Euro	-	73a
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Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£20.00	1	£3.70	(c)	90a, 93a, 96a
		Wargame: Fantasy	SSV	e, p, G	?	?	5 Euro+	(a)	90a, 93a, 96a

	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.	Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref.
Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	EPI	e, p,	?	?	?	(a)	90a,93a,96a	Slapshot	C-O	Sport: Ice Hockey	McC	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	53s
Legends of Israa	C-O	Adventure	VIK	e, p	Free	0	£1.00	-	-	S-League, The	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	SPO	p	£5.00	0	£20.00 for 9 wks	-	90s
Lizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	TNL	p	£5.00	2	£2.50	-	54a, 90a	Smuggler's Run	C-F	Sci-Fi	ABM	e	Free	0	\$0.50	-	-
LotE: 1	M-O	Power: Historical	HAR	e	?	?	?	?	(84a), 97a	Soccer Manager	M-O	Sport: Soccer	RBY	e, p	£12.50 per season	-	-	-	87s, 89a
LotE: 10	M-O	Power: Historical	ADA	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Soccer Sevens	H-O	Sport: Soccer	SEA	p	£3.00	2	Free	-	52s
LotE: 11	M-O	Power: Historical	BAI	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Soccer Star	C-O	Sport: Soccer	TRI	p	Free	2	£1.60	-	23a
LotE: 13	M-O	Power: Historical	COR	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Soccer Stats	C-O	Sport: Soccer	OAT	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.00	-	51a, 85a
LotE: 16	M-O	Power: Historical	OLS	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Soccer Strategy	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SOF	p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4	-	40s
LotE: 19	M-O	Power: Historical	OLS	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Soccer-Six	M-O	Sport: Soccer	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.00	-	35a, 41a
LotE: 2	M-O	Power: Historical	DGN	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Space Troopers	C-F	Sci Fi	KJC	e	Free	-	Free	-	94s
LotE: 20	M-O	Power: Historical	EFS	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Spaceplan	C-F	Sci Fi	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£9.00 for 4	-	57a
LotE: 23	M-O	Power: Historical	HEL	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Speculate	C-F	Economic	SOF	p	£5.00	3	£2.25	-	-
LotE: 24	M-O	Power: Historical	NIE	e	?	?	?	?	(84a), 94a	Squad Leader	H-F	Wargame	SOV	p	Free	0	£1.50	-	82s
LotE: 25	M-O	Power: Historical	MAT	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	SSFA	M-O	Sport: Soccer	BAY	p	£5.00	0	£15.00/season\$	-	40s
LotE: 4	M-O	Power: Historical	ADA	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Star Empires IV	C-O	Sci Fi	SQU	e, p	£10.00	3	£3.00	-	64a, 74-75a
LotE: 42	M-O	Power: Historical	DOD	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	StarCluster	M-F	Sci-Fi	STE	e	Free	0	Free	-	96s
LotE: 5	M-O	Power: Historical	PAT	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	StarFleet Warlord	C-F	Sci Fi	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£3.00	-	72a, 78a, 91-93d
LotE: 51	M-O	Power: Historical	MAR	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	StarQuest	C-F	Sci-Fi	HAQ	e	£10	1	£3.50	-	46a
LotE: 7	M-O	Power: Historical	HTW	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	Starweb	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	\$7	0	\$4.50	(a)	9a, 32-37d
LotE: 8	M-O	Power: Historical	FLI	e	?	?	?	?	(84a)	SSL	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SSL	e	Free	0	£2.25	-	-
LT Wars	C-F	Wargame: Future	SPE	e, p	Free	2	£1.90	-	76a	Takamo	C-O	Sci-Fi	ALG	e	\$9.99	0	\$19.99 / month	-	89a, 90a
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£10.00	2	£3.90	-	6a,80a,88a,94a,96a	Tartarus	C-O	Misc: Robots	FAR	e	Free	0	Free	(a)	75s
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Mobius I	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	\$8	0	\$8	(a)	47a	Ten to Three	M-O	Sport: Soccer	FOS	p	?	0	£4.00	-	-
Monster Island	C-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	0	£2.10	-	-	The War to End All Wars	C-O	Wargame: Fantasy	GOB	e	Free	0	Free	0	-
Monster Island	C-O	Adventure	ABM	p	\$6	0	\$6.50	-	-	Throne of Cofain	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	LAR	e, p	TBA	TBA	TBA	-	-
Monsters	C-F	Misc: War	PEG	e	Free	0	Free	-	91s	Timelapse	C-F	Sci Fi	WRG	e, p	Free	3	£2.00	-	46a
Mortis Maximus	C-O	Sport: Fictional	MAD	p	£10.00	2	£2.50	-	81s	Total Conquest	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	e	1 Euro	-	1 Euro	-	-	98s
Mundis	H-F	Power: Historical	SAB	p	£10.00	1	£10.00 for 3	-	-	TOTL	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	5	£1.00	-	-
Murania	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAV	e	Free	-	Free	-	-	Tough At The Top	C-O	Sport: Soccer	GBM	p	Free	0	£2.75	-	85s, 96a
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No Holds Barred	C-O	Sport: Fictional	LAU	p	Free	2	£2.00	-	69a	Ultimate Test	H-O	Sport: Cricket	WIL	p	£7.50	1	£2.50	(c)	-
Nuclear Destruction	C-F	Wargame	FBI	e	\$5	0	\$2.50	-	-	Ultra Cricket	C-O	Sport: Cricket	Ultra Sports	e	Free	No	Free	-	91s
Offside Ref!	M-O	Sport: Soccer	CAR	p	Free	0	£1.40	-	43s	Ultra Tennis	C-O	Sport:Tennis	Ultra Sports	e	Free	No	Free	-	-
Overlord	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	STM	p	£10.00	4	£2.50	-	57a	Viking Saga	H-O	RPG: Historical	VIS	e	Free	0	Free	-	90s
Paloma League, The	H-O	Sport: Soccer	SHO	p	£5.00	0	£10.00 for 6	-	43s	Vitriol	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£0.70	-	-
Panzergruppe II	M-F	Wargame	AGM	p	£4.00	0	£3.00	-	82s	War 1940	H-F	Power: Historical	CMB	p	£10.00	0	£3.00	(c)	62s
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Phantasmeh	C-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£9.95	3	£1.95	-	30a	War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	e	Free	0	Free	-	-
Planet Soccer	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SCR	p	£5.00	1	£3.75	-	77s	War of Wizards	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	e	\$7	5	\$1.40	-	-
Planetarion	C-O	Sci-Fi	PLA	e	Free	-	-	-	-	Warlord	C-F	Wargame	KJC	p	£3.00	3	£2.20	-	61-62d
Planetary Wrestling Syndicate	H-O	Sport: Wrestling	LAN	p	Free	0	£3.50	(a)	76s	Weapon, The	C-F	Sci-Fi	VdF	e	*3	0	*3	(e)	85a
Play On	C-O	Sport: Aussie Rules	McC	e, p	AUS\$10	?	AUS\$5.50	-	-	Wild World Web	H-O	Misc	RCW	e, p	n/a	0	£9.99 per year	-	-
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Pro Soccer	C-F	Sport: Soccer	OLY	p	Free	1	£1.60	(c)	32s	World War IV	C-F	Wargame	LOC	e	Free	0	*3	-	56a, 59-61d, 76a
Professional Basketball League	C-O	Sport: Basketball	TZR	e,w	Free	0	Free	-	97a	Worlds Apart	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	AND	p	£4.00	4	£4.00	-	92s
Prometheus	C-F	Wargame	HKM	e, p	£10.00	0	£2.50	-	91s	Wottascore	M-O	Sport: Soccer	CAM	p	£10.00 per season	-	£0.00	-	41a
Psyche	H-O	RPG: Future	COO	p	£20.00	1	£3.50	-	41s	WOW	H-O	Sport: Wrestling	SMI	p	£3.50	0	£3.50	-	92a
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Quest	C-O	Adventure	ABM	e	Free	0	£1.75	-	36a, 47a, 94a										
Quest Online	C-O	Adventure	KJC	w	Free	0	£2 for 10	-	36a, 47a										
Raceplan Grand Prix	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	McC	p	£5.00	1	£3.00	-	60a, 90s										
Reality Racing	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	CAM	p	Free	0	£1.75	-	89s										
Realms of Israa	M-O	Power: Fantasy	VIK	e, p	Free	0	£4.00	(d)	62s										
Renaissance	M-O	Power: Historical	XAN	e	?	-	?	-	-										
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Writing Believable Sci-Fi

MICA GOLDSTONE of KJC Games on the credible, and the incredible ...

(This is about writing believable sci-fi. It does not state that good sci-fi must be believable or that all believable sci-fi is good.)

THE SCI-FI industry is massive, with nearly every conceivable genre being developed at a frightening pace. A few decades ago wobbly plastic aliens terrorised mainstream viewers while Kirk shagged his way through the ones with mystical powers of soft focus. Thankfully those days are largely dead - or are they?

First off, it is important to define what is meant by 'believable'? There are many levels of believability, which are largely defined by the level of intelligence, and/or knowledge of the audience.

Take, for example, the film *Pitch Black*. If you can suspend your disbelief enough to allow for interstellar flight, then surely it is only a small step to believe that there are huge nocturnal carnivorous creatures that dwell underground just waiting for an eclipse in order to terrorise the surface. The basic premise is that they use infrared so cannot come out in daylight. This is enough to satisfy most of the audience, but for the more discerning viewer this is mostly tosh! These carnivores dwelt in unnatural underground tunnels with chimneys but built by what and when - they only come out every for a couple of days every few decades? They are top of the food chain - feeding on what? Where is the rest of the food chain? They can fly: why, if they live underground? They have developed IR - as believable as creatures in a vacuum developing sonar - it could happen, couldn't it? At the end of the day however, was it watchable? Yes, unrealistic, but believable to a larger degree.

In a more classic line, there is the standard *Star Trek* alien species - surprisingly human with a little bit of plastic stuck on the head and some jangly jewellery hanging of one appendage (always one, has to be asymmetrical - obviously alien). Seems reasonable: two arms, two legs, both manipulation and motivation allowed for. Nature, on the other hand, tends to promote evolution into forms adapted to a specific role. These rarely have anything to do with aesthetics. A quick glance at the most intelligent species on Earth testifies to this (humans, octupi, whales and their ilk). Again, it is possible to suspend disbelief for the universe created by the *Star Trek* phenomena, however implausible it is.

The first standard

Believable and realistic need not be the same. It is a matter of creating an environment that however unlikely will take a few knocks, ie it is easier to believe in a world containing dragons than one where it rains donuts!

As writers of a purely text-based medium, there is the advantage of not being limited to either scale or prosthetics. Aliens can be as weird and wonderful as desired as long as simple guidelines concerning the rudiments of biology and technology are followed. Nature never evolves useless attributes. There may be vestigial remains of a prior evolution. A heavily armoured creature with no natural enemies, for example, is only likely where the environment itself is hostile. Alternatively, a set of gills for a species on a desert world is highly implausible at face value, but had most of the seas boiled off as the star entered red giant phase, it is possible.

It is always best to keep these things in mind when designing aliens. Culture, of course, can act as an evolutionary process. This can be subtle, such as a cultural preference for taller people, so that these achieve a higher social status and are thereby able to support greater numbers of offspring. Higher technologies use controlled eugenics, selective DNA replication of certain genes, which can promote or prevent certain traits being passed on to children. Then there are much more brutal form of evolution, such as pogroms and genocide.

The second standard

The weird and the wonderful should serve a purpose, or have been derived from believable origins. It is not always necessary to inform the audience of the reasoning immediately. If the creator cannot justify it then it is unlikely to stand the test of time.

This creation process also serves another very important function for the creation of believable sci-fi; this defines both the surroundings and the history. By having these things to mind at the outset it becomes merely a process of expansion to generate the world supporting the object. This can even be used as a hook by which the audience is drawn in. This is especially important where the audience can participate. It allows the story to flow in the direction desired, even if the book in which the events are being written is still largely blank.

PBM takes the unique angle, allowing audience participation in the generation of history and in many cases, dictating the fleshing out of an aspect of the universe setting. This requires considerable amounts of thought if the whole thing is not to fall over in a short period of time. Films and even books have the luxury of having everything sewn up. Once written, they have their course laid out for them. For PBM, the captains of the ship are the players; the GMs are merely the navigators. Any GM that thinks differently will ultimately become a tyrant and the game will run aground. Continuing on in this nautical analogy, it is the role of the GM to produce the chart that will be used by the captains to take them to where they wish to go. Giving enough options for creative interpretation by the player generally does this. This binary relationship can and should be used to further the believability of the universe.

The third standard

A good writer draws from whatever sources are available. A good GM uses the feedback from his players to make the game universe real, which is one reason why computer games despite stunning graphics will never compete with human moderation for longevity.

From time to time as the universe develops and ages, it will become even more necessary to fill in the history. It is the natural way of things. Aspects that are accepted at face value when shown along with many others will eventually be individually scrutinised. Depending on the size of the universe, certain defining 'facts' may well prove to be false. It is even possible to allow two or more mutually exclusive facts to be presented and still remain believable. This is because history is still alive and is nearly as dynamic as the future. Scientists are constantly dismissing old 'truths' about the Earth history. It is important however that it is the audience participation that draws out these facts. Their very investigation changed the universe; all the GM did was allow the possibility of change!

The fourth standard

The ultimate test of believability is when the audience can predict the universe to the point that they are no longer the audience but part of the universe. This does not preclude surprises but these are believable surprises - a moon is not made of cheese, but may have an alien automated defence platform protecting it!

And ...

There are more standards concerning technology (Hmm, if we realign the emitter to produce an inverse tachyon pulse, it just may work - well it did in the last dozen episodes); planetary ecology and geology (Wow, isn't amazing that all these natural caverns have flat floors); and cultural development (After two hundred years of study by tens of thousands of archaeologists it is finally realised that the extinct aliens that built cities half way up cliffs with no means of access must have been able to fly).

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