

Suspense & Decision

ISSUE
13

AUGUST
2016

Inside this issue!

The Glory of Kings

TribeNet PBeM

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SUSPENSE & DECISION ISSUE # 13

August 2016

To trek unchained and to boldly go!

Published by: PlayByMail.Net ©2016



Editor: [Charles Mosteller](#)

Staff Writer: [Jim Kemeny](#)

Cover Artist: [A. Kaviraj](#)



* Consider joining our staff!

It seems like we've been here, before. On. Off. On. Off. Surely, there must be a better way?

Not only has Suspense & Decision been missing in action, the eagle-eyed among you will notice that our assistant editor, Bernd, is missing, as well. Multiple attempts to contact Bernd in recent weeks have yielded no response. This is a major loss to our publication, as Bernd was one of its best writers. Even still, the decision to resume publication necessarily requires that we move forward, regardless. If Bernd returns, I'll be glad to add him back to the masthead. For now, though, my primary focus is to just get things back underway, once more. Forward, ho!

If you're wondering just who, exactly, managed to succeed at persuading me to take up the gauntlet, once more, then that dubious credit goes to Jason Oates (whether he realizes it, or not) of [Jason Oates Games](#). Be sure to thank him (and not me) for the magazine's return. Are you glad that it's back?

Enjoy this issue! I'm already working on the next. Happy reading!

– Charles

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue #13 - August 2016

To trek unchained and to boldly go!

8	<i>Dilithium Ramblings: Has editorial madness taken hold?</i> by Charles Mosteller
12	<i>Drakensang Online: A new post in a multi-post thread</i> by Jim Kemeny aka Greybeard
16	<i>Why I Choose Play-by-Mail: Reason after reason after reason</i> by Ned Leffingwell
20	<i>TribeNet PBeM: A Rose Amongst Weeds</i> by Chris Stanifer
24	<i>Unlocking the Door to PBM: Lineal Descendants and the Art of Obstacles</i> by Charles Mosteller
28	<i>Whatever happened to Portinium?: How a game of epic proportions met its demise</i> by John James
34	<i>Agema Games' The Glory of Kings: Burma Start Up Turn</i> by Ry Schwark
45	<i>Down at KJC Games: In search of the Holy Grail</i> by Mica Goldstone
49	<i>Down the Whirlpool: Reader Feedback</i>
66	<i>The Proverbial Last Minute: A Mad Rush of Late Hour Additions</i>

COMING NEXT ISSUE: *Advanced Gaming Enterprises -- Fallen Empires -
- Phoenix:BSE -- Empires at War 1805 -- Alamaze -- & more!*

Special Thanks!



** This issue's front cover art features Jim Gagliardi starring in the role of Tom Krieger, aka Baron Mazas, of Galactic Trade & Transport - or as it is more affectionately known, the GTT - in the game Phoenix:BSE.*

Please consider submitting something for a future issue!

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Adventure Awaits!

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Dilithium Ramblings

Has editorial madness taken hold?

Charles Mosteller

I'll cut straight to the chase. The magazine is back! [Suspense & Decision](#) has returned. What does any of this have to do with dilithium or with madness, though?

Glad you asked. Pull up a chair, and sit a spell, and I'll tell you a little story.

You may have thought that things were back on track, before - with issues ten or eleven. Apparently not, however, as Suspense & Decision went missing, again. How do we ensure that this will never happen again?

Apparently, we can't. You see, there are no guarantees in this world, not as it relates to the publishing of PBM magazines, anyway. As near as I can tell, we'll just have to make do with what we have, when we have it. Granted, that's far from an ideal situation, but as I have explained before, we live in an imperfect world.

And so it is with that thought of imperfection in mind, I have resumed command. I have the Conn. This ship comprised of letters and words, of paragraphs and columns, of articles and art is moving forward, once again.

Unlike the building of the U.S.S. Enterprise, no United Federation of Planets - no united federation of anything - produces this magazine. The

only way that it gets done is if we publish it, ourselves. And for that very reason, the way forward will always remain haphazard. Its future will always remain in doubt.

Once upon a time ago, there was no Suspense & Decision magazine. It came into existence because myself and a few others became energized enough to make it happen. The transition from concept to reality requires a certain degree of energy, it seems. Isn't that always the way that it is, though?

By now, our publication's readers have probably long since given up on us - and who can blame them? We've left them stranded - again!

We've let them down. We've disappointed them. We have failed.

I ask myself, *"What would James Tiberius Kirk do in a situation like this?"*

Which is why I now explain to you the nature of this issue. Issue #13, you see, is a rescue mission.

Who, exactly, will we be rescuing?

All of us. You. Me. Everybody else. Anybody and everybody that retains any inkling of interest, at all - no matter how small - in seeing this literary vessel take to the stars of our imaginations, once

more!

Failure always demands that a price be paid. No matter how steep a price that failure commands, we are not obligated to let our failures determine for us the value of our next undertaking.

In the movie Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, it was Khan Noonien Singh who said about that which he pursued, *"He tasks me. He tasks me and I shall have him! I'll chase him 'round the moons of Nibia and 'round the Antares Maelstrom and 'round perdition's flames before I give him up!"*

Compared to that, what then is it to pursue another issue in this, our ongoing saga in the annals of play by mail gaming?

While the lineal descendants of PBM gaming continue to struggle, continue to contend with what to call whatever it is that they have become, from this Captain's Chair, I can say with absolute certainty that the term PBM - **Play By Mail** - continues to prevail in the hearts and in the minds and in the vocabulary of the hobby's most die-hard stalwarts.

Our absence from the publication scene for a bit may have persuaded some that PBM's time has come and gone. They may have persuaded themselves that our absence was a tacit admission of defeat. They may have even concluded that Suspense & Decision had, at long last, been vanquished to the dustbin of history.

If that is the case, then Issue #13 rises

to refute their case. It appears once more on their horizon. Suspense & Decision is back - *and with a vengeance!*

Issue #12 never materialized. Yet, while its absence is conspicuous, its absence does not bind us to never publish again.

Clearly, as this issue demonstrates, we can - *and we do* - reject such a false destiny.

People can think whatever they want to. After all, they typically do. It is no different, just because what we are dealing with here is the publication of a magazine in digital form.

When Suspense & Decision first started out, we proceeded at what I feel was a good pace. Along the way, we encountered obstacles. Indeed, we have faced danger in the form of an uncertain future every step of the way.

If you ask me, everything about this little adventure of ours has a distinct air of uncertainty about it. I suspect that some never thought that this magazine would materialize in the first place. The possibility is very real that there were some who never thought that Suspense & Decision would publish as many issues as it did. Likewise, the probability is very real that there are some who are reading this article who believe that Suspense & Decision magazine will never capture anew the regularity which our first several issues enjoyed.

All hands - battle stations! This rescue is underway. *Full speed ahead!*



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Gothic Hammer is a FREE browser based online space opera game. The game has 10,000 sectors in the starting quadrant so it is small enough to actually get to know players yet big enough to go off into the frontiers if you like semi-solitary play. The game is easy to play but the strategies are deep. PLAY FOR 6 MOVES and YOU'LL BE ADDICTED!!!! (In a good way).

Drakensang Online

A new post in a multi-post thread

Jim Kemeny aka Greybeard

I have been playing on [Drakensang Online](#) for about 6 months, and have nearly 20 posts on this topic on [PlayByMail.Net](#). This is the latest (1st June 2016).

My best character is now a Spellweaver, who uses magic to attack with. There are four character types - Ranger (bow), Dragonknight (sword/axe melee), Spellweaver, and Steam Mechanicus. The latter is dwarven and specialises in steam mechanics, can build a temporary fortified position on the field to support the character, and has access to various mechanical aids like a steamroller. This is the one character-type I have not tried.


Each new character you start up begins with being led through an introduction to the game, which is based on quests, and which takes your character to level 6. This is very useful. NPCs can be approached if an exclamation mark (!) shows above its head. Once you solve a quest the NPC who gave it to you shows a question mark (?) above its head. Sometimes this is when you have

brought an item the NPC wanted you to get as your quest.

I would urge anyone playing this to take all the quests you can. They are in a sense the key to playing effectively.

My Spellweaver has now reached level 28 and operates entirely out of the Resistance Command Centre. Resistance against what, you may ask? In the game at large the main enemy is the undead, and there are necromancers who worship this god and have the power to summon undead to attack their enemies. You can actually watch this happen when one of the Nefertiti you are confronting does this.

The Resistance Command Centre has a second task to confront Pillaging Dragon Berserkers that have the power to breath fire as an attack (in addition to melee). My Spellweaver's main area of operation is on the Burning Coast, accessed directly from the Resistance Command Centre. I believe the pillaging dragon berserkers were responsible for turning the Burning Coast into a burning hell,



There are necromancers who worship this god and have the power to summon undead to attack their enemies.

littered with burning buildings, ruins and abandoned wagons, etc. But no doubt all will be made clear later in the game.

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NOTE: Be sure to read Greybeard's [multi-post thread](#) about Drakensang Online in the forum at PlayByMail.Net.



[Drakensang website](#)

[Drakensang forum](#)

[Drakensang on Facebook](#)

The book cover features a dramatic illustration of a woman with long, dark, wind-blown hair. She has a serious, intense expression and is looking slightly to the left. She is wearing dark, rugged clothing with a high collar and a strap across her shoulder. The background is a dark, moody landscape with a large, full moon in the upper right corner, casting a soft glow. The overall tone is mysterious and action-oriented.

Mark G. Manley

Blood
Games



Blood Games - Current Novel



Author Mark G Manley



Dark Arena - Previous Novel

War throws the land of Alastari into chaos by the Rirorni horde invasion. Swept up in the conflict is My-re, a girl living near the Rirorni plains. Regarded as a spoil of war, she is raised in a Rirorni family.

Now, life in the Rirorni Empire is dangerous, brutal, and short. Her troubles begin as warlords within the Empire fight each other for prestige, property, and honor. For mutual protection, the family teaches My-re the Wall of Steel combat style, when executed correctly, no blade, no weapon can penetrate.

Confronted by a prominent warrior, My-re kills him. Found guilty, she is sold to a slaver and exiled back to Alastari. However, there is no joyful return, as she is sentenced to fight in the Blood Games arena.

My-re's one chance of freedom is winning the tournament. However, to become champion, My-re won't have to best her opponents, but slaughter them.

Throughout the years, many fine managers have enjoyed the play-by-mail game of Duel II by Reality Simulations, Inc.. One very intense period was during the Rirorni War, which threatened to engulf all of Alastari.

This event serves as the backdrop for the author, Mark G. Manley to bring to light this epic story. Since the release of the novel Dark Arena, he has worked to bring his next novelization to life and make the story of the Rirorni War and the subsequent events available to the greater public.

Blood Games official release date was 6/30/2016, and the novel's link is below.
<http://www.blackrosewriting.com/sci-fifantasy/bloodgames>

The novel is also available on Barnesandnoble.com, Amazon.com, and Kindle, by searching under the author Mark G Manley.

The novel is a treat to read and provides a rich background to the play-by-mail game of Duel II at www.reality.com.



Why I Choose Play-by-Mail

Reason after reason after reason

Ned Leffingwell

[Note: For this article I will be using the term play-by-mail, even though turn-based game, correspondence game, and other terms are in use today.]

We live in a golden age of gaming, as there are many options when it comes to games and entertainment today. Video and computer gaming are billion dollar industries, and app games have brought gaming to a wider audience. Eurogames and strategy board games are now mainstream and are sold in stores such as Target. Role playing games are over 40 years old and are attracting new and old gamers through the internet and [Kickstarter](#). There is easy access to various types of quality gaming. Out of these choices, why pick play-by-mail gaming?

One reason for choosing play-by-mail gaming is that it allows me to play against many opponents at once. If we exclude party games, most strategy board games have a practical limit to the number of players that can be involved. My favorite board game, Diplomacy, maxes out at 7 players. Play-by-mail games allow for games with many opponents. Games with players in the double digits are the norm. Because the company adjudicates the game turns, usually with computer help, games with

many players are easy and feasible. These games give me the feeling that I am a player in a grand struggle of global (or galactic!) scope.

Play-by-mail also gives me access to opponents. Finding opponents for games can be a challenge. We have to coordinate schedules, block off a 2-3 hour (or longer) time slot for the game, and find a place to play. Play-by-mail takes care of those logistics. Opponents are already located and are dedicated to the game. The venue is my own home, office, or wherever I find the time and space to work on my turn. Finding a block of time is not as big of an obstacle. A player does need to invest time into planning and crafting their turn, however they do not need to do it in one sitting. I can work on my turn at my leisure as long as I have it ready by the turn deadline.

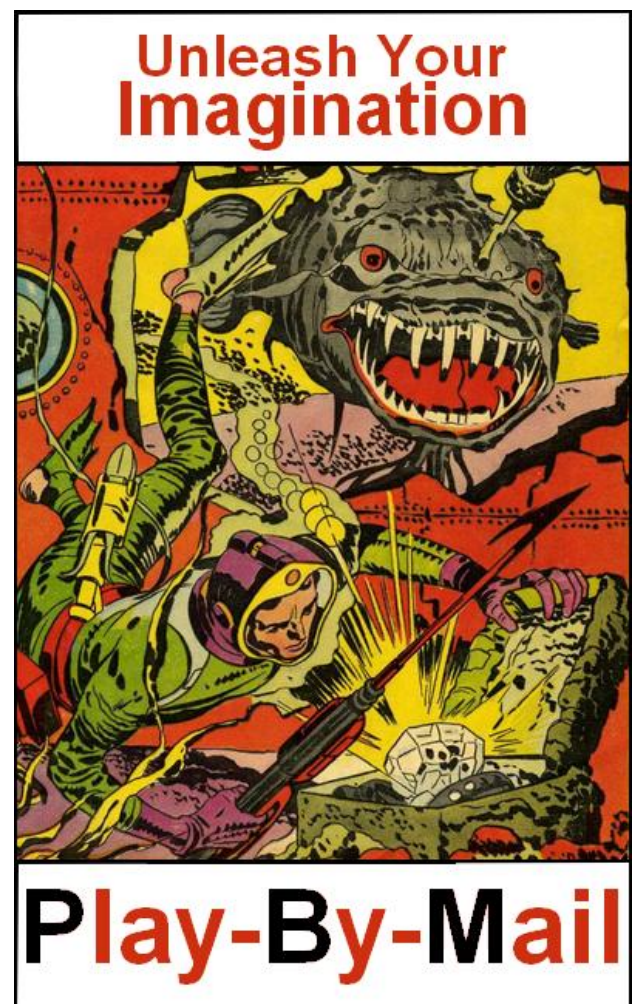
Because play-by-mail games are moderated, I can focus on just playing the game. When I gamemaster a session of Dungeons & Dragons, I have to be knowledgeable of all of the game rules, the stats of the player characters, and the plot of the story. When I play a strategy board game, I also have to know all of the rules of the game and make sure that my opponent and I follow them faithfully. When I play a play-by-

mail game I can focus on how the game plays and let the moderator do the heavy lifting. While I still need to know the rules and strategy, I focus more on my participation and my enjoyment.

The time factor is another reason I choose play-by-mail games. I used to brew my own beer and wine. Homebrewing involves a lot of work up front and then a lot of patience as you sit and wait for your product to mature. Part of the process is staring at a bottle of wine on the shelf, wondering how the flavors are developing. Time will pass, and as you go about your everyday existence your batch of beer or wine is slowly developing its way to greatness. A play-by-mail turn is the same way. I can ponder correspondences, research plans and rules, and craft strategies. Once I write down the turn, all I have to do is wait for my plans to ferment. Opening an envelope of game results is like opening a bottle of aged wine, and I can savor the sweetness of victory or the bitterness of defeat.

I find that play-by-mail offers a sophisticated gaming experience. My social and cognitive skills are pushed to their limits. I can engage in a complex simulation game that is hard to duplicate in other formats. The time between turns helps to mitigate the industrious task of planning turns. I will probably never be the head of a nation-state or galactic empire, having to juggle alliances while crafting plans of diplomacy and battle. Play-by-mail is the closest that I can come to that

experience.



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TribeNet PBeM

A Rose Amongst Weeds

Chris Stanifer

In a world inundated with games offering immediate gratification, profoundly predictable gameplay, and near-mindless questing and raids, there are few games left which appeal to those players who favor strategy over flashy graphics, inter-player interaction over PvP, and an immersive, dynamic world over scripted storylines and endless cut-scenes.

TribeNet is one of those games.

Born of the PBM genre in the mid-1980's, TribeNet developed a large following of die-hard strategy and empire building gamers who didn't mind spending 2 weeks pouring over detailed turn reports and maps, contacting allies, arranging trades, or hatching battle plans before jotting down the next turn's orders and sending them off by post. And then waiting. It's what we did, and we loved it. The excitement and suspense we felt when we knew our turn reports were going to arrive was palpable.

TribeNet went through a short list of GM's during those early years, and was eventually turned into a PBEM game with the arrival of the Internet Age. Since

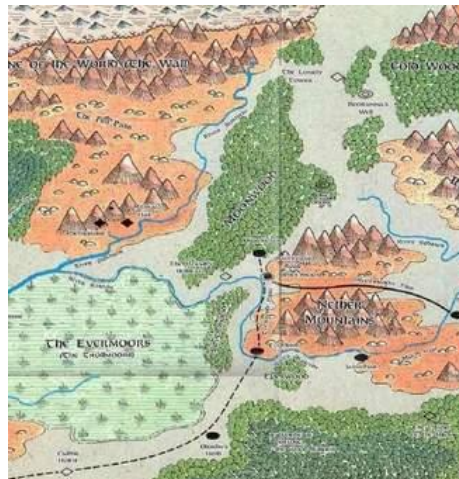
1997, TribeNet has run almost continuously, and has been, for the past 20 years or so, helmed by Peter Rzechorzek ("Peter the Unpronounceable" to many of his long-term gamers).

A complete "re-boot" of the game happened a few years ago, and the world started anew. Many of the Old Guard returned to play in the new version, and a host of new players have joined, as well. We currently boast in excess of 50 players internationally, with more joining every turn.

The beauty of TribeNet for old-school PBM-ers lies in it's nostalgic look and feel....reports are delivered in text format,

and mapping is performed by the players themselves (with most of us using Hexographer, which makes map sharing easier.)

The allure for old and new players alike lies in the game's expansive geography, open-ended "story", and near-limitless avenues for expansion and growth (either by the sweat of the brow, or on the backs of your conquered opponents.)



The milieu of TribeNet is very similar to Bronze Age or Iron Age Western Europe, though there are aspects which bring to mind Eastern cultures and the slow advance of knowledge and technology. Steel swords can be used right alongside primitive bone Spears, and warriors wearing plate armor are often pelted with Mongol-inspired Horsebows. Any "fantasy" element is only alluded to in a vague description of the Alchemy skill, and even that is only a rumor.

The primary social/political unit in TribeNet is the "Clan", which can be split into smaller tribes to conduct various activities, build villages, and more. Tribes can be further split into smaller units which are useful for a wide variety of tasks including exploration, Mining, transporting goods, or exploring the vast and mysterious oceans.

There are no pre-designed "classes" in TribeNet...no Clan is pre-destined to be a "Merchant" clan, or a "Warrior" clan, or a "Slave Trader" clan. The player controlling the Clan makes the call on how he/she wishes to run the Clan based on the Skill Attempts chosen each turn during game play. And, the list of skills available is pretty expansive, offering many, many opportunities for deciding which direction you wish to take. It is entirely up to the player.

The first few turns of TribeNet are offered for free, as a sort of "trial period" to see if it is the kind of game for you. After the initial 13 turns or so, turn fees are not extravagant, and, for the

entertainment value you can receive, are actually quite reasonable. A player such as myself can easily spend a few hours per day planning, communicating with other players, exchanging maps, and generally enjoying the various aspects of the game. That time requirement is not typical, and most orders can be completed in under an hour for a fairly well established clan. But, you can put as much or as little effort into the game as you wish. That is what sets TribeNet apart from so many of the modern time-sink games which require you to spend a certain amount of time online each day. TribeNet is a hobby, and can be played as such. It is, however, an immensely enjoyable hobby, and I urge any player, from any type of game, to contact Peter and request a start-up.

It won't cost you anything, and you might just stick around to see if you have what it takes to conquer the world!

Chris Stanifer
0421 The Blackrune Free Company

Website:

<http://tribenet.com.au/>

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DESIGNER
PATRICK RUESTCHMANN



DEVELOPER
ROGER MILLER

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Unlocking the Door to PBM

Lineal Descendants and the Art of Obstacles

Charles Mosteller

Play by mail gaming, or PBM as it is affectionately known to those of us who have partook of its flavor of entertainment, has been around for many decades.

Lineal descendants of PBM, those PBM games that have sought to deliver a PBM type of gaming experience, but through electronic and digital mediums, have invested a lot of time, energy, and effort over the years to perpetuate - and to grow - the core gaming experience that traces its origin to play by mail gaming.

As I sit and survey the PBM landscape, including those PBM games of the post-postal variety, and as I explore various websites pertaining to the same, I am struck by what I perceive to be a litany of obstacles that game companies and game moderators continue to impose upon prospective players.

Accordingly, I want to take this opportunity to try and highlight some of what I consider to be the most glaring examples of obstacles that I think continue to keep many potential modern day gamers from the PBM scene.

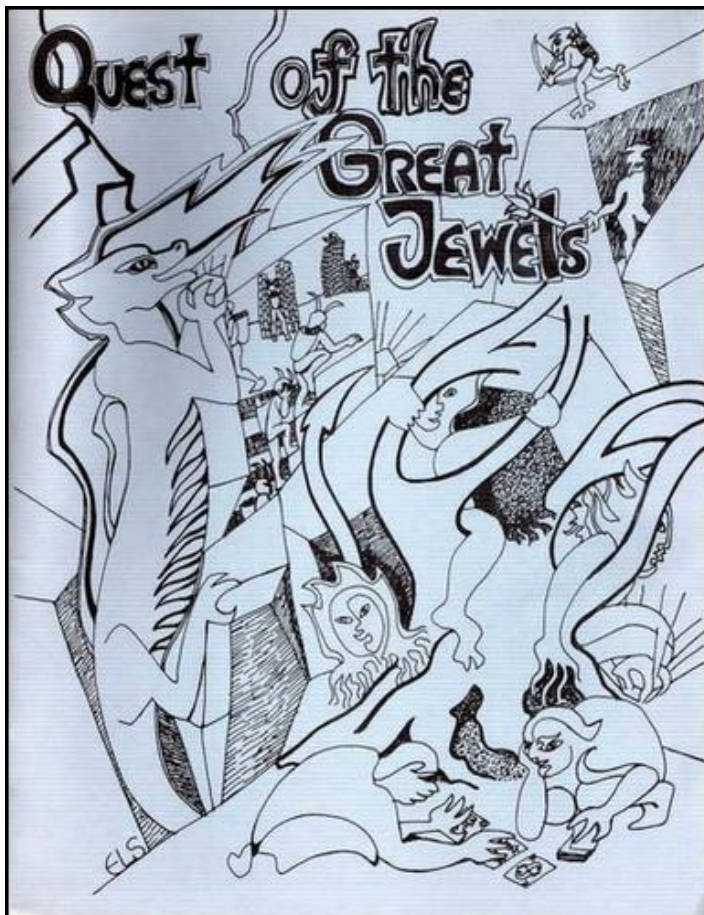
(1) Advertising - Advertising, by its very nature, forms part of the presence of a game company - one that should properly be a very visible component of the game company's overall strategy.

Yet, much of what relatively little advertising for PBM games and their lineal descendants that I run into tends to be dated in appearance.

(2) Ease of Entry - How quick and easy is it for a potential new player to find and access all of the relevant info necessary for them to go from not being a player to getting right into the thick of things - and here's the clincher - without anyone else having to help them?

(3) Pricing Structure - Gaming is a form of entertainment - and the budget of a given household tends to get divided many different ways. The entertainment budget within the overall budget tends to get divided numerous different ways, also. PBM games have a history of being notorious for a multitude of different fees. Set-up fees. Turn fees. Special action fees. Each fee-point presents a separate obstacle to attracting new players.

(4) Community - Communities of players tend to grow up around games. Many game companies use forum software to provide their respective communities with a place to gather and discuss their games. Can prospective new players to your games read your forums, without having to register? Registration is a potential obstacle to growing your game's player base.



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Whatever happened to Portinium?

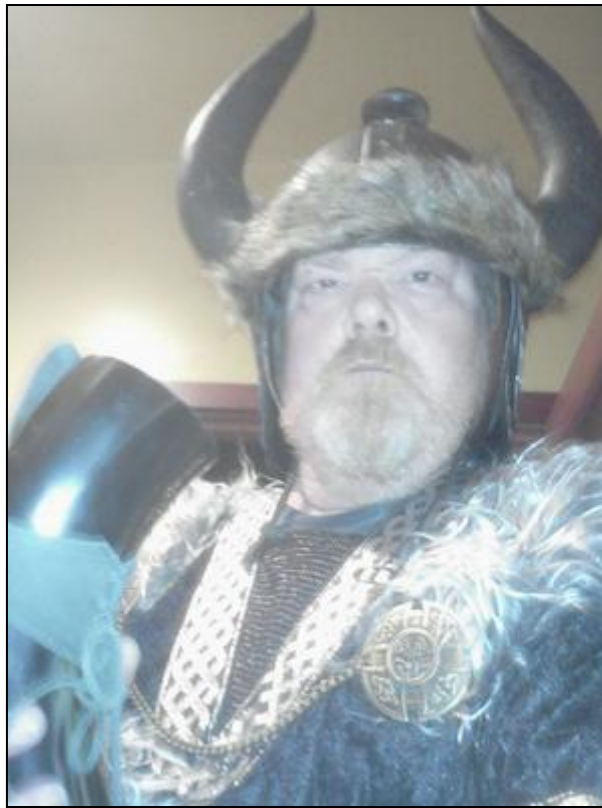
How a game of epic proportions met its demise

John James

It has been such a long time since I spent 7 years of my life on creating Portinium, and getting the team of 6 other people together, that most people have forgotten about it. My dad funded the project, back then. He was an highly successful Architect, owning his own business for 37 years, before he died in 97. But he didn't know games, and he was not into them. He was a great man, highly successful and everyone loved him, including me. I told him I loved him, every day.

Then we had one of the programmers change the copyrights to his copyright, but he didn't know about the first version of the game. So, when that was revealed, he returned the copyrights in the program back to me. Also, at the start, we were going to buy another PBM game from someone else. But before that deal was going to go through, anonymously, I was sent game documents from another game, that showed that this guy that was selling a

PBM game had plagiarized another game out there. So, I made Portinium from scratch. Came up with the concept, and then hired a team to come up with the game.



At the end, that original guy tried to bad mouth us, and went to the programmer that actually then got caught changing the copyrights. I found out by accident picking up the phone in the office and overhearing the conversation. So, it was a slap in the face from a guy that plagiarized other games, and then tried to sell them to unsuspecting people.

Honestly, it was a nightmare, and that original guy then tried to get our awards taken away from AndCon in 92 & 93. Had to get a lawyer and got the copyrights back, but I had to let the programmer walk away and not ever name him, since it came to my attention that my dad authorized him to do so. Don't ask me why. I still have a problem with that. But my dad gave the

opportunity to try and do it, so I was very fortunate enough to get the opportunity.

Then came Computer Gaming Reviews' Jan 2003 Issue with a 4-page color insert and review of the game which they described as professional and there is nothing half-baked, and was excellent. Which, honestly, the game was really good. But dad, after reading the article, turned right

around and pulled the funding. I had the same accountant back then as my dad, and after my dad died, she told me it was a tax write off for him.

Another stunner. At the time, I gave all our employees a month paid to two months paid time. All employees were an hourly wage. Then I reimbursed everyone that had played the game or had bought a packet. It was the right thing to do.

So, I've seen the comments on the Net about it. Most are just not even close to being correct, or even the same ballpark. They just did not know what happened, and I know some of the people that

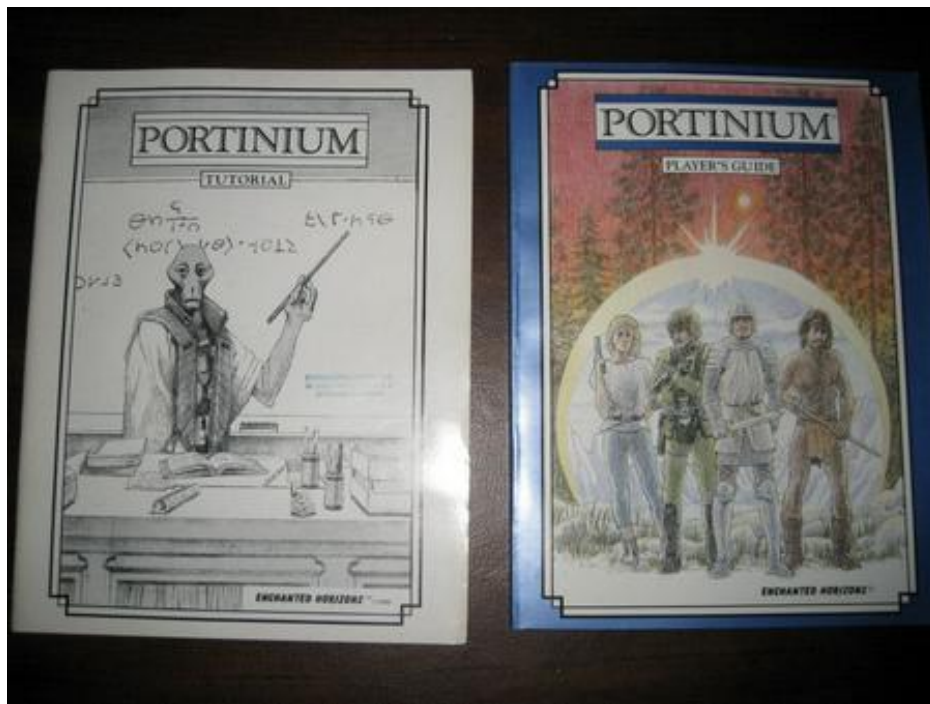
wrote those comments. There was really no way to tell them. I had never experienced anything, before or after, like what actually happened. Most of my time spent out of the office was trying to save the game. I knew it was good, but there were many heated arguments at the end with my dad. Most of my employees took his side, because he was so successful, and had no idea that he was trying to end it. So, it was a F-ing

nightmare.

There were good people there, too, that worked their asses off, and it was not fair to them. But there were some bad apples, as well, and no one on the

outside knew, nor on the inside. But I tried to compensate everyone, when we closed. Nor could I say anything about it.

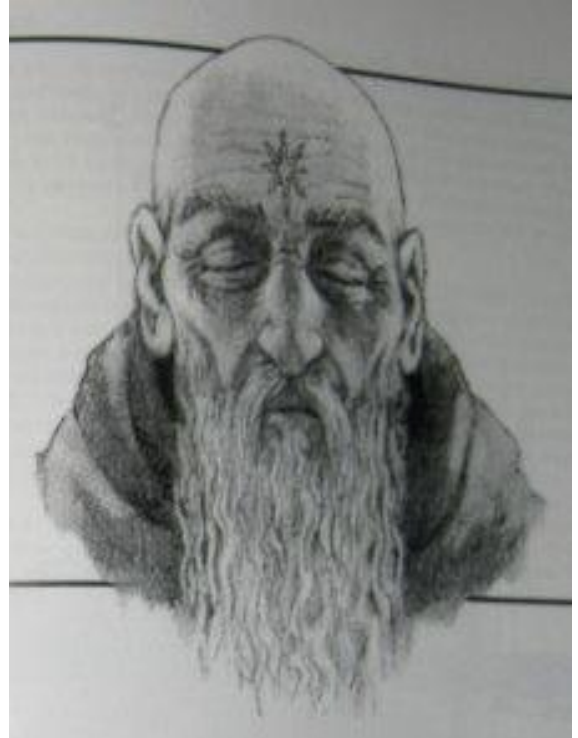
Plus, I made mistakes, as well. No one had ever tried that design concept, before, at that time. So, I made some stupid errors, as well. But eventually, it all comes down to me, and I am a stand up guy, and I take responsibility for why we closed. I didn't see those things coming. It blindsided me, when I was



told to shut down. Thus, the blame lies on me. it was crushing! Dad wouldn't even give me a recommendation, to get another job, so even though I sent resumes out to other companies, there was no work after that. It basically crushed the dream of Game Design, and took the want to even try again out of the equation.

It has been 28 years, since I started it, and I had a love for it - and some talent, as well, even though it was never recognized. We made a solid game, and the game booklet was amazing for back then. With all of the above, I am still proud of what we did, though it never really got a chance to have a following. Soon as we released, the funding was cut. I think that it was less than a month after the Computer Gaming Review article came out. It really was a great game, and a great concept. Playing on four levels of time at the same time. Looking back, now, it never had a chance. The funding was cut, as soon as it released. The lack of morality of some people didn't help, either. So, when it closed, I took the blame for it, the full blame for it - which was my responsibility, as the lead designer. Rightfully so, and in my opinion, when something like that happens (and I had never experienced anything like that, before), you've got to say, Hey, man, the blame is on me." So, I did that. My dad gave me the opportunity to even try it, and for that, I am thankful. It is not his fault. He apologized two years later, after it closed, and said that he felt some of my employees were not loyal, so he

started messing around in it, and some of the employees bit. Even though I didn't know, and it was a major shock, it is my fault. I didn't see it.



But with that said, it crushed my dream, and I have no want to, to ever try something else in the field. I still play online games. I enjoy them, and if I see a math error or a design fault, I let that company know. Some listen, some don't, but I still try to help others, so they don't have to go through with what we experienced with Portinium. It is professional courtesy. Some take it and some don't, but I always tried - and even to this day, try to do the right thing. I did the best I could at the time, to put out the best product possible. It was fun to play. It was solid, and it truly was a good game that very few ever got to see.


Which is absolutely crushing.

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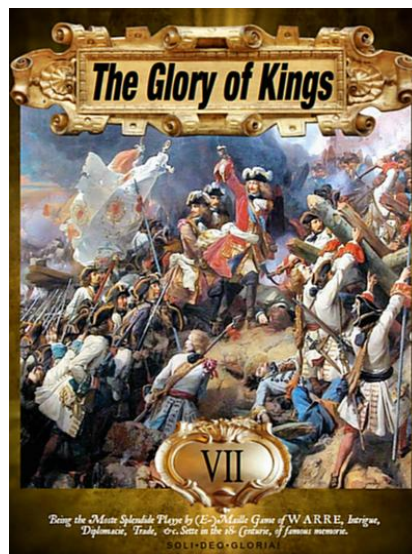
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3. Choose your position, and email AGEMA your choice on one of the above email addresses to make it has been reserved for you.
4. Please visit the AGEMA website to make a payment to set up your game account. The payment should be made on the Pay for Turns page on the bottom right part of the home page at www.agema.org.uk.
5. AGEMA will then send the set-up details of your position, including the in-game newspaper, any letters available, and relevant maps as well as state-specific files.

The game newspaper will tell you the date the next turn is due in to AGEMA. Well done, you are now playing **THE GLORY OF KINGS**! Game turns are typically processed once per month.



Agema Games' The Glory of Kings

Burma Start Up Turn

Ry Schwark aka Deacon on the Agema Forums

This article is intended to give prospective players of Agema Games' The Glory of Kings a view of what a start-up turn looks like, and how the game works. Many new players join existing games where their positions are likely to be more advanced than the true start up turn that this is. Even so, this article will give you a basic view of the key parts of a turn and some advice on how to think about the position.

The green outlined sections below are from the start up turn for Burma in Game 8 in The Glory of Kings (January 1700). The two column white text is my commentary on the start-up and my advice. I'm sure not all players will agree with all my advice, but I hope this gives a window into the fun that is The Glory of Kings!

Affairs of the KINGDOM OF BURMA; SN62

You are King Thalun Toungoo of Burma.

It is considered 'good form' to consult the Priests of the Court of Ava in Ava before making a decision to change taxation levels. Such assemblies are not in session and meeting unless you provide them with a palace in which to do so. They cannot discuss matters of taxation, or anything else, unless they are first provided a palace.

SN62 is the "State Number" of Burma in this game (game 8). It used to be that these numbers were necessary to route messages between nations. They aren't used any longer, but sometimes are still referenced by players.

Most players typically choose to start their position playing their historical counterparts. If you're playing France in

period, you're Louis the Sun King! For larger positions, some of these things are necessarily defined. But for many of the smaller positions you're free to change them if you'd like. Add a spouse, add children, or be single (as here) with all the fun of finding a bride!

The point about taxation reflects on the points that I made in Issue 11's

column. First, not a lot happened fast in 18th century. Second, your honour score depends upon how well you play to type and please your subjects (mostly your nobles). You can be a high-handed ruler, but expect those actions to cost you honour as you ignore your nobles and advisors concerns!

Sometimes that's exactly the right course because you want to do something and you don't care that it might annoy some, so you take the hit to your honour score and just do it. But most of the time, you want to play nice and period to build up your honour. That way you have plenty of honour to spare when you decide you don't care what anybody thinks!

Also, most nations need to establish a "palace" for the advisors to meet in before they can be summoned to consider your proposals to change taxation, and at 100,000£ to build, probably not what you want to invest in first in the game! But, it's also a good idea to leave taxation alone until you have a better handle on the game, anyway. Taxation, by the way, is abstracted in the game into 4 taxes: Nobles, Church, Commoners, and Foreigners. If you know anything about how crazy taxation was in the period, you'll be happy it's abstracted! So if you decide you want to change some weird tax, expect it to get abstracted up to this level.

What to do next!

You are the character named above. However, at the moment you have no named government ministers or ambassadors. So, if you wish, you can appoint gentlemen to positions such as army minister, navy minister, treasurer minister, and trade minister. If you want to send one or embassies out to other countries, you may also do so by naming ambassadors and saying to which country each is going.

One of your first steps in the game is to start building out your government. Up to a point you can describe the talents/personality you're looking for in a minister. But fair warning, all non-player characters have flaws to match their talents. If you try to appoint the perfect minister of the army, you may find out that he secretly wants to overthrow you! The rulebook has more examples of how this works.

These ministers will be key sources of advice. It is often good to ask them

about things you are planning or considering as they may suggest better ways of achieving your goal, or tell you why what you're planning will be an expensive failure!

Even so, they all have personalities of their own and biases, so take the advice they give with a bit of skepticism. Army ministers are always likely to tell you that your nation is doomed if you don't raise more troops, while naval ministers will lament that they can't possibly defend you without more ships.

Ambassadors are a good way of ensuring that you have ties to another nation, but there's an interesting game twist to how ambassadors work. Their cost is paid by the HOST nation (not you). As a small nation, you may not want to invite a lot of ambassadors that you have to fete regularly! Conversely, you may want to

send an ambassador to a nation that you'd rather had a few less coins in their pockets.

You can refuse an ambassador, or all of them, but it helps from an honour score standpoint to come up with some believable excuse. Perhaps you're paranoid and think they're all spies!

Also please notice that your Assets list shows what forces you have at the moment. This is a strongly based on historical precedent (but having said that please note that we won't argue over what you have, so please just accept they are as given, thank you!).

Please decide which of your cities your troops are to be in, and how many units and of what type is in each of these cities. Note that you may not at this point form armies, fleets, patrols, etc. Just tell us which city the units and ships are to start, and then next turn you can start forming armies, fleets, and patrols using change orders.

You are limited to having your forces start in no more than six different locations to start with, so you can choose to have them at most, for example, split between six cities. Of course you can during game turns move them to other locations.

You can also, again if you want to, appoint generals and admirals to command the forces in each garrisoned city.

If at this stage we don't hear from you where your forces are to start we may be forced to allocate them to cities for you.

We've taken this approach to allow players to have a greater initial input in where there Assets are, and what their characters are called.

So, welcome to the game and thanks for taking part! This is going to be good – very good!

Regards,

Richard
FOR AGEMA

For smaller nations, this typically isn't a big challenge. You won't have enough locations that you'll be challenged deciding on the few places to place your units. Conversely the larger nations with

far-flung colonies will have to think more carefully about where they place units, probably with a plan that they will immediately start moving some of those to other places to spread them out

across their empires.

Assets of Royal Burma:

Roads; E (next; £200,000)
Canals; E (next; £800,000)
No Magazines:

Roads and canals are key infrastructure that help the movement of goods and people (and troops!) through your territory. They start at E, and can be improved one step per year, up to A. Doing so will typically result in a nice growth in the Economy of your realm which means that your trade and tax income should rise.

But fair warning again. Roads deteriorate, and require regular expenditures to keep from falling apart. Canals will start to collapse and fill in if not maintained with spoon dredger technology. (You don't have spoon dredger technology you say? Prepare to pay one of the nations that do richly for the secret!).

So think about the math of your road/canal investments. Does it make

sense to spend a lot to increase your Economy and the growth rate of your investments and taxes, or should you just directly invest that money to grow your trade income first so that you have a larger base and invest in roads and canals later?

Also, these costs for Burma are quite high, and reflect the fact that Burma is a mountainous jungle! As a comparison, roads across the Spanish empire cost a mere 100,000£, and canals are a steal at 600,000£! I personally would defer spending on either of these as a start-up player for Burma until I'd built up my base income quite a bit.

In future turns, the first part of your turn will be the GM exposition on your actions, your ministers answering your questions and the like.

1 tribal matchlockmen infantry battalion (Portuguese adventurers).
20 tribal matchlockmen infantry battalions.
1 siege artillery battery.
4 elephant war herds.

20 galleys.

23 inactive tribal archer infantry battalions.

The second part of the turn is the listing of your assets. This part of your turn will likely grow longer and longer as you play

These are the units you start the game with. You'll need to decide where to place

the game more and build up your position. At start up, it is relatively bare bones.

them. Not all your towns and cities will be listed on your turn initially, but you

will receive a map of your nation and region with the setup, and can also reference historical maps to determine where you'd want to place your units.

Units also can undergo 6 months drills (twice) that will upgrade their discipline/training. That is frequently one of the first orders that players give. Note the 23 inactive archers. Inactive units do not cost any annual upkeep, but must be paid their full annual upkeep and given a month to be called up into active service.

One of the tricks you can use if want to save money is to drill your troops and

then place them inactive and keep the money to call them up available. That will save you the annual upkeep, but ensure they're available and well trained if needed.

But be careful! One of Burma's smaller neighbors did this, and Burma planted a spy in the paymaster's office and invaded. The pay to call up the inactive reserves got "lost", and the head of Arakan met a grisly fate when none of his inactive troops arrived in time to save him!

In Ava;
Royal Palace.

Your own palace! You're encouraged to take the opportunity to roleplay your leader and place comments in the monthly game paper about your doings.

You can also build out your royal compound with gardens, chapels, theatres and whatever else your royal heart desires.

Cannot produce flintlock muskets or lineships.

All infantry must be tribal type.

No elite cavalry may be raised.

Many of the non-European nations start with significant restrictions on troop types. Don't let this get you down. Many of the troops you can raise are likely well-suited to the environment they work in. My Portuguese well trained troops took quite a walloping from a bunch of spear-wielding Africans and I barely won a victory!

Also, all of these things can be learned from those that can do them. It will probably involve some negotiations, but many of the European nations want to have good relations with the far off nations they trade with, and might be willing to trade some of their technology for other advantages.

No other shipyards, army camps, institutes, &c., have been created yet (those that are will appear here, once they are).

You can invest in a large number of different types of facilities in the game: from various military camps and shipyards to raise military units or create weapons, to research institutions to

develop technology breakthroughs, to grand cathedrals (or in Burma's case, stupas or pagodas.) that display your wealth and piety.

Treasury of Burma - (8)

Situated in Ava

17,474,000 tangkas.

Personal wealth 720,000 tangkas.

10 tangkas = £1.

You typically receive your annual revenue with your December turn results. You will pay out your annual upkeep on your May turn (costs will be given with your April results, so if you need to make an adjustment before the money goes out the door you can.)

Personal Wealth is an odd quirk of the game and is generally driven off your Honour Score. The higher your honour, the more you receive. You are also allowed to invest up to your annual

Personal Wealth income in something to increase it year by year. You can also do things like ennobel men who have served you well and grant them a portion of your annual honour income as an estate.

Note that your treasury exists in a place, and it is where your coinage is minted. If you let your enemies overrun it, you can end up in trouble. Of course, if your enemies are overrunning your capitol that's rather the definition of trouble, isn't it?

SPENDING:

(please detail here)

Turns are relatively free form, though try to remember that there is a person on the other end trying to make sense of what you're telling them. I struggled with this at first, as I enjoyed roleplaying and it made my turns unwieldy and my orders were often not executed as I

intended.

Now, my personal custom is to create a number list of orders describing my actions as simply and as directly as possible. If I want to add some roleplay, I'll do that in quotes after the order. If

I'm doing a fair number of similar actions (like every January when you decide how to invest your revenues to keep your revenues growing year to year), then I will create one overarching order, and then sub-bullet the orders.

For example:

1. Investments:

- a. 500,000£ in far east trade
- b. 300,000£ in the 'true cinnamon, the spice cassia

2. Send an ambassador to Canton

China. I want an ambassador skilled in trade who can help me identify ways to improve my trade with China.

3. Go tiger hunting. "King Thalun, hearing that tigers are troubling his subjects, calls up his personal guard and mounting his favorite elephant went tiger hunting in the nearby jungle. The hunt went splendidly, with many of his courtiers remarking on how fine a shot his majesty was." (You could miss the broad side of a barn, and your courtiers would still insist you are a wonderful shot, right?)

4. Etc.

After the free form orders, I will do the "military change" orders in the same style, though typically starting with noting where the units are to help the GM locate the unit on my sheet. These would be telling troops to drill, or move,

form up into armies and fleets, or to attack somewhere.

Lastly, I do the correspondence section. As the game is designed to mirror the pace of the 18th century, in-game communication must only go through the GM on turns. No emailing back and forth with allies or enemies. This slows the pace of communications down, and also means that if somebody gets an agent in the right place, they can disrupt your communications!

For correspondence, it helps to make a very clear "To" to make sure the GM delivers it to the right place, note the month of sending, and lastly note it is delivered via your ambassador to that nation if you have one. Ambassadors help ensure your correspondence arrives in a timely fashion, among other things.

The GM will copy and paste your correspondence into the recipient's turn, so you just need them to be clear and separate enough that he can do so. If you're old school and based in England, and really play by post, then he will scan your correspondence and include it that way. Personally, I find that receiving the turns electronically is a huge bonus. They arrive faster, and you can archive and search them electronically so much better. Since I sometimes travel on business, it's nice to be able to work on my turn or read a newly arrived one in my hotel room.

Surplus recruits: 5,400.

As I described in last month's column, recruits are required to raise all military units and are usually the biggest

challenge to players trying to build up their armed forces. They are very valuable so spend them wisely.

HONOUR 6
ECONOMY 6

Honour for most nations starts at 6 as does the economy. There is no upper limit on honour, and as you keep playing the game, it should continue to rise. Each game has an honour 'leaderboard' so you know how you stack up to your peers! Some positions work a bit differently, like pirate positions, where you get 'honour' by being dastardly!

Economy runs from a low of 1 to a high of 10. Much, but not all, is in your control. Certain investments and actions can raise it, famines and high taxes can

lower it. The higher it is, the more you can expect your economy and investments to grow. If it's low, you can expect your economy and investments to shrink. Sometimes global events impact your Economy in ways you can't control.

If your Economy ever hits 1, watch out. The game rules say that with an Economy of 1, you are subject to the possibility of natural disasters: earthquakes, catastrophic floods, Typhoons, etc..

Kingdom of Burma, &c.

Below you will find the two key financial documents that you will get during the course of the game year. At startup, you get them both, but after startup you'll get the annual running costs in April, and the revenues in December.

Note the 4 tax categories that I mentioned before. The second part of the revenue is trade income. This is where your investments play out. There are an enormous range of investment options you can take, but the one piece of advice

I'd offer is to try to find out what resources your nation uniquely has, and try to start investing in that before branching out.

You'll note that this early in the game that the products traded are blank. As your trade grows, and you invest, you'll see the products that you're trading in, and where they stack up. Changes in those products can have a notable impact on your revenues. If you're the only one with a certain product, you will

probably do well. But if for some reason everybody invests in that product, then competition will likely drive down revenue for everyone. That is one of the reasons I advise diversification. If you're

too invested in one product or market, either intentionally or by accident another player who invests there can damage you.

TAX REVENUES							
	Earnings:	Population:	£ per head:	Tax income:			
Nobles	5%	£3,000,000	200,000	£15.00	£150,000		
Temples	5%	£1,200,000	400,000	£3.00	£60,000		
Commons	10%	£3,400,000	3,400,000	£1.00	£340,000		
Foreigners	10%		Trade	£474,000	£47,400		
			Total tax		£597,400		
Taxed population	4,000,000						
TRADE REVENUES							
Region	Revenue	Main	Secondary	Third	Fourth	Fifth product	%CS
Levant	£0						
Baltic	£0						
Maritime	£0						
Europe	£0						
East Europe	£0						
Americas	£0						
India	£0						
Africa	£0						
Far East	£150,000						
	Total trade	£150,000					
Total revenues	£747,400						
Recruits	5,400						

As you can see, troops and other on-going costs can rapidly rise to consume most of your revenue if you plan poorly. Don't worry about all the military unit notations, they're relatively easy to figure out with the rulebook. The institute listed here is your royal palace. Like many institutions in game, it costs a lot more to open it, than to keep it

running (100,000£ versus 10,000£). A typical research institution costs 50,000£ to open. One of the consequences is that unlike units that you can just put into 'reserves', if you stop paying for an institution, you have to start all over, so plan wisely to ensure you will get the full benefit of your investment.

Burma		Number of;	Cost;		
MAGAZINES	£20,000	0	£0		
SPIES	£4,000	0	£0		
MISSIONS	£5,000	0	£0		
BASES	£1,000	0	£0		
INSTITUTES	£10,000	1	£10,000		
	TOTAL		£10,000		
GOVERNMENT RUNNING COSTS			£150,000	POOR RELIEF	£0
ARMY		Number of;		Miscellaneous	£0
Dgn/Skm	£5,000	0	£0		
Horse	£8,000	0	£0		
Elite horse	£10,000	0	£0		
Elite inf	£12,000	0	£0		
other inf	£10,000	21	£210,000		
Town Watch	£5,000	0	£0		
Btn guns	£400	0	£0		
Artillery	£4,000	1	£4,000		
mArt	£8,000	0	£0		
Fort Cannon	£10,000	0	£0		
Elephants	£4,000	4	£16,000		
	TOTAL		£230,000		
NAVY					
L, g, k, ya, C, Sl	£2,000	20	Add elite	£3,000	0 £40,000
b, spn drgr	£50	0	Add elite	£75	0 £0
FRG, GFRG	£3,000	0	Add elite/H.FRg	£4,500	0 £0
FGA	£3,500	0	Add elite	£4,750	0 £0
EIM, L.Sl, fL	£4,000	0	Add elite	£6,000	0 £0
L.SOL	£12,000	0	Add elite	£18,000	0 £0
Gln	£10,000	0	Add elite	£15,000	0 £0
SOL, Glss	£8,000	0	Add elite	£12,000	0 £0
Marines, Ldle Drgdr	£1,000	0			£0
Embassies	£0	Loan int.	£0	TOTAL	£40,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		£430,000			
In tangkas		4,300,000			

The annual spend sheet is also a bit of a sobering view for smaller positions who have limited resources, you want to prioritize and figure out what you "have to have" versus "wish you had". If you try to do too much, you risk starving your trade investments which you'll need

to make to ensure your economy and income keeps growing year on year.


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Down at KJC Games

In search of the Holy Grail

Mica Goldstone

So, what have we been up to in the past year or so, since our last article? How have things changed, if at all, and what plans do we have for the future?

For [Phoenix](#), our flagship product, I can say that things seem to be bobbing along on an even keel. We are getting regular sign-ups, thanks to our presence of the Browser Based Games voting forums, even if we are not rapidly expanding.

I suspect that Phoenix (being text and table heavy and shiny-bauble graphics light) is somewhat seemingly impenetrable for many modern gamers, but we are finding a few old boys rediscovering us and get the occasional player who is disillusioned with rinse and repeat king of the forum table style that seem to be common amongst browser based games.

We do track sign-up and have discovered some useful points in the sign-up to paying customer process. We have identified a few places where we lose customers and possible places to modify.

Knowing where to change and sacking off everything else in order to sort it is not always sensible, simply because it has to

be weighed against improving and expanding the game for the current veteran players, as well as the inevitable emergencies (The latest? - A power-cut during off-line to online syncing, causing some not-immediately-apparent data corruption). As such, we are pushing things that will, in theory, give

something for veteran and potential new customers, alike.

So, what are we actually doing?

We are pushing things that will in theory give something for veteran and potential new customers alike.

Currently, development time is being split into two areas. The first is expansion of colonisation mechanics (custom code), and the second is game engine upgrade (missions & characters). This is possible, because Phoenix has its own compiler language, which allows the GM to develop custom code that is interpreted on the fly.

For example, `ReadPosition['thisShip']` is a function that, when called, loads into the array variable 'thisShip' all the relevant data appertaining to a position, dependent on the type of position loaded and `WriteBasicPosition['thisShip']` checks that data before saving it back to the various databases. This means that the person writing this code does not need to

worry about all the checks on position data, and does not need to worry about messing up the entire data structure by writing back the wrong sort of data. Basically, it is a nice functionalised library that allows for development and testing in a relatively safe environment, without the need to compile the entire game each time there is a minor change to custom code. This enables the development of order code outside the framework of the engine. The custom code is essentially a standalone plug-in to the Phoenix engine. As such, it allows the engine to be worked on, independently.

I would love to say that this does not have its issues, but unfortunately, it does. Occasionally, I will find that I need either a new function or change in how a function is handled. Recently, it was the case of Addition. $1+2=3$ whereas $'A'+'B'='BA'$ due to how variables are added to the compiler stack and removed from it. To fix the issue, the Addition functionality had to first quantise the variable into a string or number, before determining how to add and remove from a stack. While the issue has workarounds, such as setting the variable to STRING before dealing with the function, our development projections meant it was better to deal with now, and save a lot of lines of code workarounds. The best thing about this is that each time a function is either added or improved, it is there to be drawn on and used ever after. If we ever develop a new game, we have years invested in this engine and function library that is,

for the most part, completely independent of the Phoenix game.

As players of Phoenix know, over the years, we have developed its online presence. This has been to my mind the thing that has ensured the future of the game. There is always more that can be added, but we feel we have reached the stage of bells and whistles, except for a few GM tools to do with mission editing. Conversely, from what I can see, those games that eschewed away from having integrated online features have died, or at least have disappeared to some murky underground that I haven't discovered. Similarly, news groups, once the breeding ground for discussion and latest in-game news, have also dried up. Yahoo chatlists are only visited by spambots selling unnameables, as far as I can see.

With respect to mission editing, we are effectively looking to kill two birds with one stone. By pushing the mission editor, making it significantly easier for the GM to moderate and play-test missions, we will be able to expand on the number in the game, thereby appealing to both new and veteran players. The holy-grail of the mission editor is to be able to go off-mission through special actions - something that is currently not possible, due to the sheer amount of variable testing in every step of the mission.

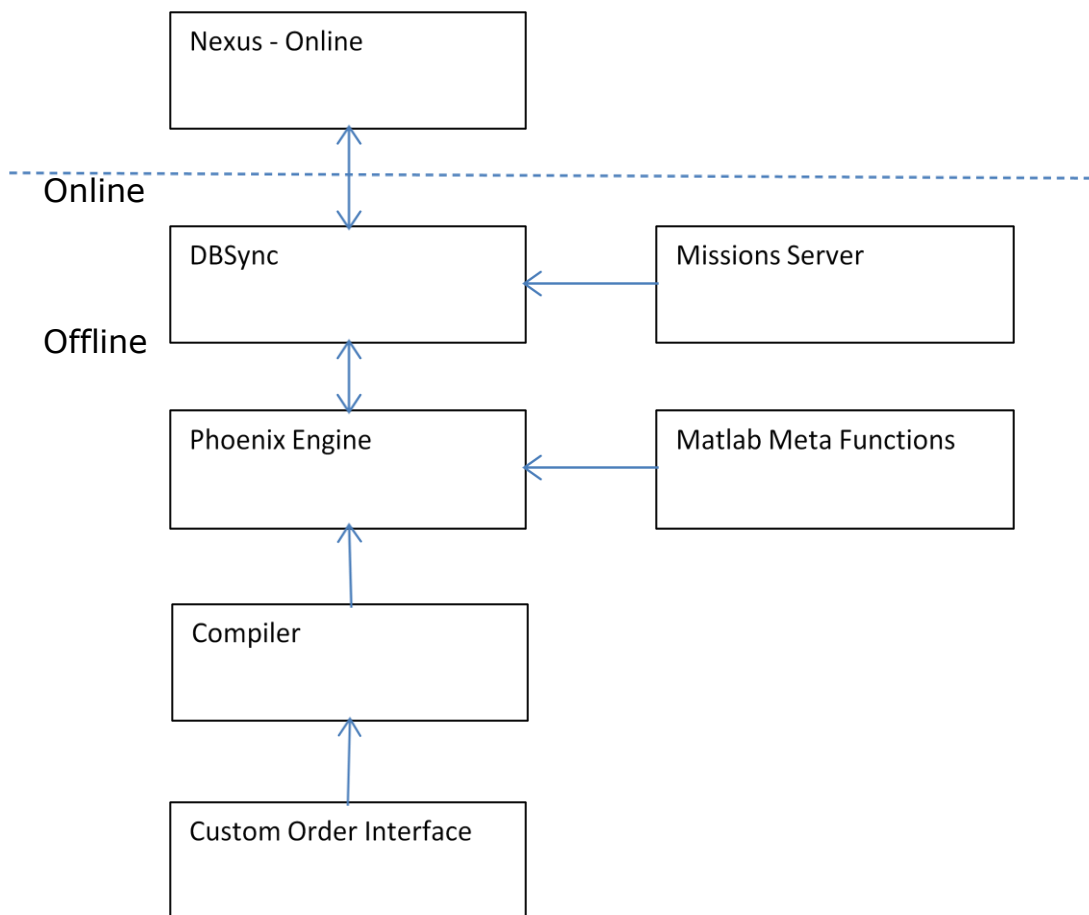
So, over the next few months we hope to tidy away the main aspects of planetary development, covering everything from initial colonisation and establishment of governments through to terraforming

both the atmosphere and planetary sectors. This, though, will be an ongoing thing, as players seek to capitalise on the greater detail given to worlds. I have always been interested in clandestine activities, such as smuggling and terrorism. To get these into the game,

we will be looking at missions and characters as the main instigators of the nefarious activities.

So, all in all, we have our work cut out for us, as we continue onwards and upwards.

*** The diagram represents the structure of the game and how facets of it are both linked and independent.**



<http://www.phoenixbse.com>

Down the Whirlpool

Reader Feedback

Assorted Readers Speaking Out via E-mail, Forum, and the Web

Hi Charles,

I don't think that you should write off the gratitude that you deserve for what you have done so far. There is, as far as I am aware, a real enthusiasm for your work. So, please don't be disheartened.

Can I suggest that a smaller issue minimising the work required would be better every few months, than the mammoth tome once in a blue moon?

It's about consistency and regularity - not the page count.

People do actually read the thing, and Company Commander is better for it.

Regards,

Jason Oates

=====

Dear Jason,

I appreciate the sentiment and the support. At the time that you wrote this e-mail to me, you had no way of knowing that your words would be the ones to oil the rust off of me, resulting in my return to publishing Suspense & Decision, once again.

I'm glad to hear that you think that

your game, Company Commander, is better for Suspense & Decision having been published. I encourage you to post more frequently about the game's development and progress on your company's website and Facebook page.

Best of success to you, going forward, Jason!

Charles

=====

Hi Grim,

Currently, I am recovering from a very bad car crash at home. I have also asked Carol (our GM) to take over Briny, due to the long turn about as I have lost the urge to play it now. However I still play in La Glorie du Roi, so not finished with PBM by a long way yet. Richard is looking to bring out a Roman era game in the near future called 'Rome is Burning.' However, he will be closing his Napoleon Battles game, but said he will do odd one for game players who have played it but new start ups.

Toppers

=====

Toppers,

I hope, as I'm sure S & D's readers do that you recover both quickly and

fully. I decided to include your message to me in Issue #13, both because you're a long time and well known player in the PBM community (I'm sure that many are sorry to learn of your misfortune), and because you gave me a heads up on what Richard over at Agema is up to.

You get better, buddy! Godspeed to you on your recovery!

Charles

=====

I will get some stuff to you over the coming weeks (I presume we are talking weeks). In the meantime I would encourage you to downsize the mag, for no other reason than to preserve your sanity, and therefore increase the probability of continuing the great boon to the industry/hobby. I would suggest that instead of stuffing everything you get into the next issue, par it down, and be continuously working/assigning articles to 3 or more mags of, say, half the size of the last ones you did. It will, hopefully, reduce burn-out.

Regards,
Mica

=====

Mica,

Looks like you made it, as I have included your article in this issue.

I don't have a hard number of pages set for each future issue of Suspense & Decision, but what I will likely be

using as a general aiming point will be forty-eight pages, give or take a few as the submitted material allows and requires.

To have multiple issues in the queue at any given point in time would require noticeably more material to be submitted. Perhaps you could use your powers of persuasion (or mind control, if that works better for you or Kang) to convince your player base to contribute to the cause more frequently. That might work better than me stirring up hornets in the Phoenix:BSE forum, or trying to rattle the cages of the various affiliations.

Plus, the upside to it would be more frequent mention of your company's games to our readership, by virtue of there appearing both more articles about your games, as well as articles about your games appearing more frequently. They will do it for you, where they might not do it for me.

It is a shame that Kang doesn't share Kang's 'wisdom' with our readers, as Kang is one of your gaming community's more colorful personalities.

I hope that you enjoy this issue's front cover, seeing as how it was Phoenix:BSE inspired.

Charles

=====

Charles,

We do have some cool stuff happening. I will get you the particulars. Are you planning to do another issue as big as before or are you thinking of sliming it down somewhat? I know that you feel that the bigger the better is the format you want but I am a less is more kinda guy. Smaller issues allow you to store up content for future issues and you can announce upcoming articles to create anticipation in your readers. You also can even out the work schedule so you are not destroying yourself to get all of it prepped and done.

We bought Gaming Universal from Bob McLain back in the day and published a nice monthly magazine that did alright, so I am quite sympathetic to the difficulties of running a game related magazine. It is even more difficult, these days, when readers have such short attention spans.

I will be in touch with the info about Takamo Universe later this week.

Randy Ritnour

=====

Randy,

This issue should be smaller, as per your suggestion, although it ended up being a little bit longer than what I was actually aiming for.

One of the last things that I add to the issue is this section, Down the

Whirlpool.

So, that entails me going back through messages sent to me, and I don't really know how much space that this section will take up until I actually finish copying and pasting and writing responses, as each case may be. Then, I have to add enough other pages (of ads and what not), so that the issue will publish in increments of 4-page swaths. Otherwise, if some reader tries to print it's PDF contents out onto actual paper, the page count won't work out right.

The consensus, such as it is and such as it has voiced an opinion at all, appears to be smaller issues, but greater regularity. So, that's what I have decided to aim for. Whether that's what we end up with or not is anybody's guess, at this point.

Oh, and in case you actually read this thing, someone (or some thing) named Omega is still waiting for their access to your Takamo forum to be activated.

Charles

=====

Charles,

Just would like to know your status. Are you continuing publishing, seeking article submission, not sure?

I'm sure you would like articles pouring

in, just like companies would like new players signing up, but for someone to write an article, they want to know if you are still interested in publishing. I think you are (obligated to) / stuck with reaching out to writers of articles and publishing deadlines, etc, if you want to continue. Meanwhile, honestly, it is just a courtesy to readers and contributors to say if you are on or off.

If you are disappointed with thinking it should be self-propelled for submissions, etc., we on the game side don't see that happen either.

Rick McDowell

=====
Rick,

I was going through old e-mails, prior to pushing Issue #13 out the old publishing door, and I came across this message from you to me about the magazine.

Someone should get credit for taking me to task for Suspense & Decision just falling off the face of the Earth, as it did. So, it might as well be you. Let the lashings commence!

The good LORD doesn't promise us tomorrow, so I'm in no real position to promise anyone that there will ever be a next issue. For better or for worse (and it's probably for worse rather than for better, realistically speaking), it is what it is.

Various individuals have lamented over time about the issues of burnout and page count. Life tends to be a little more complicated than that, as does magazine publishing.

I've never been burned out on the subject of play by mail gaming. It has been my experience down through the years that getting burned out with a single game is far and away more likely than me ever getting burned out just talking about PBM gaming, which is basically what I am doing with this whole magazine escapade.

Honestly, I think that Suspense & Decision would be far better off in someone else's hands. However, thus far at least, I have proven to be rather incapable of persuading anyone else to actually do that and publish more issues on their own.

Not publishing Issue #12, aka the missing issue, wasn't exactly a planned thing. To the contrary, in fact, the initial objective stated quite a long while back was to publish twelve issues.

Again, life gets complicated, though. Plans change. Reality has a way of reasserting itself, and moods and motivation have a habit of changing, as well.

Is the magazine on or off? Well, so far, it seems to have run in spurts of

both, Rick. Was it planned that way? Nope, not at all. Could I have just appeared and declared one or the other? Oh, sure, I could have done that.

But, I didn't. If I had, then you might not be reading this issue, right now - you or any of Suspense & Decisions other remaining stalwart readers.

I started to end Suspense & Decision, previously. Certainly, that would have both served notice to our readership, and it would also have freed me from any 'obligations' to publish any more issues of the magazine.

But being my usual ornery, uncooperative self, I ended up taking a path that ultimately brought us right here to where we are - that very next issue that you, yourself were wanting and lamenting about.

Consider the long and winding path that you, yourself, have taken in your quest to bring Kingdoms of Arcania to life. Sometimes, it can just plain take a while to get from one step or phase to the next, along the path of progress.

Apologizing could have been a rather quick, easy, and painless exit from the magazine scene. Leave it to me to miss a golden opportunity like that.

Instead, here I am - a prisoner in this prison of my own making. Apparently, I have decided to sentence myself to a longer sentence with Suspense & Decision magazine.

I suppose that I could always hope for time off for good behavior, but from the sound of it as I read and re-read your message to me, my lack of courtesy already demonstrated will likely foreclose that option to me.

Hopefully, you can still find it within yourself to forgive me, Rick, even as you join me in serving this sentence re-imposed anew as one of our magazine's readers and contributors.

Thank you for your patience! Be sure to send me something to include in our next issue.

Charles

=====
Hello Charles!

Here's my next Galac-Tac technical article for this month's S&D. However, I would like to express some concerns I have about the publication of my previous article in last month's issue.

I realize that you and Bernd have taken on (thank you!!) the massive job of editing S&D, and that the editor's prerogatives include modifying articles as needed, but I was disappointed with last

month's editing job (whoever did that) on mine. It seems that some forty-four commas were added to my article, a few of which are grammatically incorrect, some of which actually change the purpose or meaning of my text, many of which are unnecessary, and all of which I would rather do without. I feel that such heavy editing reflects negatively on my reputation as a writer.

There were also a few formatting edits that changed the emphasis of my text, but those were less numerous. In my opinion, all these changes also made the article more difficult to read.

I do spend a lot of time editing my articles before they are sent in. I hope that future articles will not be so extensively changed before publication, or that you will ask me for revisions if you feel they are needed.

I do very much appreciate the opportunity to submit articles, and be an active part of the S&D community!

Davin Church

=====
Davin,

As with other 'letters' appearing in this column, this message from you to me is a bit dated, since it was sent by you in November of last year (2015).

Nonetheless, just as I am willing to include articles that are critical of

games or game companies within the not-so-very-hallowed pages of this magazine, likewise I think it only appropriate to include comments from our readership that take issue with the magazine and its staff, myself included. Plus, it gave me something to help flesh this column's entry in this resurgent issue.

All articles submitted for publication in Suspense & Decision are subject to being edited. I don't try to edit for content - and especially if it is critical or simply something that I personally disagree with. I do, however, try to edit for typos and punctuation - but even there, many invariably manage to make their way into each and every issue.

Do I ever get carried away with making revisions for punctuation? Probably so. Can that be frustrating to authors that submit articles? Again, probably so. Ultimately, though, we all live in an imperfect world. You can rest assured, Davin, that I make no claim to be a perfect editor, nor even a particular good one, as those things go. Rather, I make my 'contributions' to each issue that this magazine aspires to, flawed and deficient and frustrating as they may ultimately prove to be.

Even still, I do appreciate authors and articles submitted. I try to encourage and promote a diversity

of views and authorship.

Unfortunately, I still have the quirks that make me who I am. Please, endure with the magazine, even still. Maybe at some point, some future issues of Suspense & Decision can help to begin to grow your company's player base, by continuing to publish both your articles and your letters.

Time, being the rare commodity that it unquestionably is, will likely preclude me from granting your request that I ask you (or anyone else, for that matter) for revisions in your respective article, if I feel that they are needed and after you have submitted articles to me. As you can clearly tell, by now, I have my hands already full, just trying to get the next issue out. The seeming lack of time to get everything desired done seems to be something that I have in common with PBM uber-personalities Lee Kline at Reality Simulations, Inc. and Rick Loomis at Flying Buffalo, Inc..

As Rick Loomis told me in an e-mail just yesterday (August 22nd, 2016), *"As a PBM company, time is one of our most limited resources. I very well know that!"*

For the foreseeable future, anyway, Davin, my main focus will be on getting each new issue out the door, and I won't be allocating any large chunks of time to authors for the

purpose of allowing them the opportunity to revise their submissions prior to publication, once received.

That's not to say that you can't ask or that it will never happen. Rather, publication in pursuit of achieving greater regularity will take precedence over giving authors a second chance to get their articles polished and refined.

Charles

=====
Hi again Charles!

I've also designed a new series of mini-ads for inclusion in S&D on an as-you-need-them basis, as I mentioned briefly last month. I'm sending you the first several that I've got ready and hopefully I'll have more to add to the list in future months.

These mini-ads are designed to look, in concept, like little "bulletin board" notifications or business cards or miniature recruitment posters or "help wanted" ads in the newspaper. But each one is different! The idea is that the first time or two someone sees one of these in the magazine they may just gloss over it, but after a few times they'll start noticing that they're all different. Then I'm hoping that they'll begin stopping to read each one just to find out "What does this one say," rather like the old Burma-Shave roadway signs. If they're intrigued enough by the presentation,

they'll go find our bigger ad in the magazine or just visit the web site to find out more. At least, that's my idea. I'll have to see if it works out.

Each mini-ad is tiny (about the size of a physical business card), especially compared to our usual full-page game description. They're designed to fit exactly within one column of magazine text (3.5") and they're only one-fifth of that column in height (1.9"), so we're talking less than 1/10th of a page in total space. Since an article or editorial seldom ends right at the bottom of a page or column, you're almost always left with some space to fill, right? Rather than having to find or invent so many of your own cartoons or text blurbs to fill in such spaces, I propose that you insert one of these mini-ads at the top or bottom of a column to take up some space wherever you find it convenient.

Again, I'm not asking you to put in ALL these ads into one issue, but just randomly choose a few of them to scatter across the magazine whenever and wherever you think you can use the space filled. Each month you can pick out a few different ones to sprinkle in around other ads and articles. Hopefully I'll be able to give you enough to use over time that you won't need to repeat any of them for a while. (I've come up with about 3 dozen game-related things to say so far, but finding interesting artwork for each one is more difficult.)

Do you think this would be of some

benefit to you as copy-setter? How do you like these first few mini-ads?

Davin Church

=====

Davin,

Hi, again! It is always better to hear from our readers more, rather than less.

I like the mini-ad concept, just fine. I included one of them in this issue, in fact.

I am a strong believer in PBM companies, as well as their lineal descendants, taking a more active and imaginative approach to the creation of advertisements for their gaming products. In some instances, I am running ads in issues of this magazine that originated decades ago (Yes, decades!).

New ads are invariably better than old excuses. Hopefully, more PBM companies and lineal descendants will emulate your example, and at least try to come up with some new ads.

If an ad still works as good as the day that it was created, then all the more power to it. If a given ad still gets the job done, then that's a good thing. If an ad is more stale than bread can become, however, then no game company should rightfully expect to enjoy a feast of new or

returning gamers at their company's table of entertainment for the masses.

=====

Hi Charles, hope you are well.

Just a few lines about how Company Commander is going.

The first stage of the game development for me was the map. In past games there has always been a large land mass over which the terrain is added. After a lot of work it wasn't happening for me.

I had been toying with the idea that a game based on a group of islands would present new challenges, not only for me but for the players as well. It took a while to get the idea going but the Mark II map turned out to be the one.

The new terrain has demanded that an entirely new selection of units was needed with expanded helicopter, aircraft and naval unit sections.

This involved a large amount of research. I'm surprised the CIA or MI-5 didn't knock on the door to see who has been checking out weapons for weeks on the Internet.

Once the units were settled it was time to start on the software. Currently I'm half way through that process. Of course, every time i touch the game it changes a little bit more. Quite exciting really.

It won't be long now until the new game is ready to get to the players. Hope there is something there that you can use in S+D.

Regards Jason

=====

Jason,

You sent this message to me back in November of 2015. I'm still glad to include it in this issue, however belated this might be.

One of the great deficiencies of your game company has been, in my considered opinion, an over-abundance of silence on your part. I would encourage you, Jason, to continue to regularly publish news and updates and details about your games. To get noticed, making noise will help you more than by remaining silent. Hell, the PBM industry as a whole suffers from being saturated with silence. Somebody needs to be the one to change that. Why not let that somebody be you, Jason?

Charles

=====

Grim,

This will be brief. I will have more content later. This mostly just about what I sense about you and S&D in issue #11.

So, I repeat myself. Don't have 120

pages, of which 90 are skipped. Have like 35 excellent pages of opinion and articles and reviews. No one is reading the six page character perspective on a game they never played. Give some guidelines of content or format – the author should explain what he is addressing, why he concludes what he does, etc.. Don't just have people rambling. Again, I feel the most productive thing is to have some sort of resource where each of the top, whatever, 20 games, had a page to explain what their game is. Then, there could be opinion on that.

I just don't think from your own comments in issue #11 that it is in anyone's best interest to expect you to put out 100+ pages per month. I also say again, try to foster a few good writers that regularly contribute, not just have everyone of all different skills fill lots of pages.

Rick McDowell

=====

Rick,

Perhaps you can loan me your technique that you use to successfully persuade players of your game, Alamaze, to submit articles to Suspense & Decision each issue.

If I didn't allow anyone to ramble in their articles that they submit, then somebody out there might be quicker to notice that virtually

everything that I have said in every issue of this magazine to date has been one exercise in rambling after the next. That's the primary form that the sharing of my thoughts tends to take, on fact. Rambling is what I was doing when you and I first 'met' in a Yahoo discussion group a number of years back, as I recall. It's what led to you and I getting to know one another better, in fact.

As far as the comments that I make in issues of Suspense & Decision magazine, I would caution readers to read what I say, rather than read into what I say.

The only real guideline of content or format that I have to offer up on the altar of consideration for would-be article writers is that they submit their articles in either Microsoft Word format using the Verdana font with a 12 point font size, or that they submit their articles in ASC II plain text format. Enriched RTF text format will work, also.

Otherwise, I tend to gravitate more towards allowing the magazine to be more free form.

Fostering a few good writers that contribute regularly, particular every issue, has not proven to be one of my strong points, to date. Trying to persuade gamers to spend their time writing articles, and taking away

time from their game playing in the process, has been more akin to an exercise in pulling teeth, so far. Lest anyone out there reading Issue #13 think to the contrary, though, I encourage each and every reader of Suspense & Decision to take up the Gauntlet of Authorship, and join me in having your own thoughts expressed in words appear in each and every issue of our humble little publication, going forward.

Of course, that goes for you, too, Rick McDowell, as well as to game moderators of other games and game companies. You've written more articles than most, Rick, but the fact remains undisturbed that you haven't submitted articles for each and every issue, to date. You're an excellent writer, so you're certainly more than qualified to share your thoughts in each and every issue that we publish in the future.

Unless, of course, you've run out of positive things to say about Alamaze. It's always good to hear from you, Rick. Go Cowboys!

Charles

=====

Sorry. To me, one of the things I enjoy about play by mail is the unknown gritty aspects of the games. Not everything is known about them. The worlds you move in are free, allowing you to go anywhere, do anything. You are not forced to march

lockstep toward some predetermined goal, like in a video game. Play by mails also have a tactile joy to them.

When you open your envelope, the feel of your paper turn is very satisfying. It has weight and substance. It is real and wonderful. I think that increasing this feel with embossed paper or varying finishes on cards included would be a good way to distinguish your game from the masses. It would be a refreshing change from the way all the products are going-thinner, cheaper, etc..

Finally it is important to increase player interaction. There should be a player club, with pins or rings or some such. Players should be encouraged to write dispatches from the field. A notable record hall should be kept, with the names of winners and those who have made other important contributions.

There should be discounts available, if you bring in more friends and family to play. This will grow the game. Make being in your games a prestigious and fun and rewarding experience that connects you to the joy of living with others.

PBM should feel real and special. It should always embrace its roots and differences from common computer games. PBM must be special-filled with friends, thick with content, and embossed with time-worn care. That is the feelings we crave from our long lost youth.

William J. Hufft

=====

Bill,

Thanks for submitting what was intended as an entry for Mini-View # 2: An Interview in Miniature - Question for Issue # 11.

That I am very late in publishing your remarks does not diminish the value of them. I hope that you will see fit to continue to submit comments or articles for future issues of Suspense & Decision magazine.

Are you still getting your ass kicked in Hyborian War?

Inquiring minds want to know.

Charles

=====

Reader Feedback:

Due to the advertisement I have joined a couple of games:

1. Clash of Legends: Looks a good, clean game. Map gives you a nice feel to the game, and your PDF file lists everything, nicely. The main entry into the game is via the Counselor program, which is very helpful. You plan all your moves, and then send off, once you are happy. One game has started already, and I've signed up for a second game. I do not expect to do well in the first game, but I will take this as a learning.

2. Phoenix from KJC games: This company was my first PBM company I joined, way back in 1986, so I'm glad they are still going. I've only been playing this game for a week or two (being playing for free), but I've now taken the plunge and started to pay for better positions. You can tell the game has been around for a while, there is so much detail, already. I'm about to join a faction which will take me deeper in the game mechanics. So far, so good.

Colin Danks

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Colin,

As with others whose words now populate these pages of Issue #13, you sent me those comments (as well as an article) toward the end of last year.

So, while due to my faults and shortcomings and failures, your words are only now appearing in Suspense & Decision, know that people always enjoy reading about what others think about various games.

Your article that you submitted previously will be included in issue #14. Hopefully, I won't mess that up, as I have messed so many other things up, to date!

I'm sure that the game moderators of the respective games that you have provided reader feedback on

greatly appreciate your kind words for their game products.

I've tried Clash of Legends, previously. I think that it holds enormous potential. I really do wish that more scenarios were available currently for it.

As for Phoenix:BSE, I can't really speak well to the questions of the game play and fun factor of that game. I can't even get past the training missions, to get at the depth that lies beyond. The interface and the instructions have left me just shaking my head countless different times. Obviously, many other individuals have not been so stymied, and have taken to the game rather quickly, or have enjoyed a rather long and storied history being a part of the game. At least I am able to access the forum there, though, which is something I have been unable to do over at the Takamo forum for months on end.

Charles

=====

Hi there, GrimFinger!

Attached is a picture of this year's punkin at Whitecastle (our residence). I'd like to credit Pumpkin Masters for their excellent patterns and tools that made it possible!

It took me about an hour to carve. We had 126 trick-or-treaters come to the

door, so it was viewed by many. Maybe next year, I'll take on the Galac-Tac cover image. THAT will take some doing, but it would be a lot of fun!



Thanks for the opportunity to show off. We didn't do anything in costume this year, but we'll see about next time!

Genny White

=====

Genny,

That's a terrific looking jack-o'-lantern that you created from that pumpkin that gave its all to the cause! It's too great, in fact, to allow it to be lost to the sands of time.

So, I dredged up your message to me from last November 3rd. Halloween 2016 isn't all that far away, so perhaps including the photo of your pumpkin from last year might just spark some of our other readers to join the fun and to share photos of their own creative pumpkin undertakings this time

around.

Thanks for sharing!

Charles

=====

We haven't been doing as much travelling as we used to. The only convention we almost always attend, at this point, is OrcCon/Strategicon over Presidents Day weekend at LAX.

We sometimes make it to the sister con, Gateway, over Labor Day -- but I don't think we're going, this time.

One of these days, we will start going to Phoenix ComicCon -- the local gaming conventions died, and this seems to be the up-and-coming replacement. But we've never been, yet. It's at an awkward time of year for us.

We hold two Duel2 face-to-face tournaments a year; the winter FTF is over Martin Luther King weekend (always), here in Tempe, and we rotate the summer one, every July. It's coming up this weekend, and we will be in New Orleans.

Info on the FTF tourneys will always be on our site.

Good luck!

Lee

=====

Lee,

It looks like Issue #13 took a bit

longer to get out the door than would have been preferable, making your news above not quite so timely (my fault, not yours), but hopefully, I can do better with the next issue.

Readers, of course, always suffer from a dearth of news, timely or otherwise, from PBM companies and their lineal descendants. So many demands on everyone's time helps to ensure that this always seems to remain the one, true constant in the realm of play by mail gaming.

Nonetheless, I appreciate you providing me the update.

Time, or the lack thereof, has long been one of your primary laments - perhaps THE primary lament. Even still, I am looking forward to Hyborian War special organized games that you and I discussed, previously.

I know that Rick McDowell and crew are going gung ho full speed ahead on rejuvenating Alamaze. Hell, he's even got me licking at the chops! Where am I going to find the time to play Alamaze, though?

With Hyborian War, I really do think that RSI can give Rick and Alamaze a run for their money, as far as being able to breathe new life in a game product that's been around for - quite literally - decades on end. Truly, I think that you stand at the

precipice of a new golden era of Hyborian War game play.

As always, time is always in short supply. You know that all too well, Lee.

Even still, a small amount of time invested in what we previously discussed could, I think, yield a rather disproportionately positive and enthusiastic reception from both your current player base, as well as from prospective new players to the game of Hyborian War.

I am excited over what lies in store, just around the proverbial corner.

Charles

=====
Thank you for the correction. Done.

No, they don't have a PBM category anymore. They've completely redone the categories, and none of the categories have anything like PBM anymore. Sad. But the last time they had a PBM category, I could not get PBM companies to submit their games for possible nomination. So that category was dropped.

As a PBM company, time is one of our most limited resources. I very well know that!

It is frustrating, tho. At the same time I was also getting pushback that the PBM category just proved the Origins Awards

were outdated and worthless because "no one plays PBM anymore". Can't win sometimes.

Rick Loomis

=====
Rick,

I consolidated both of your recent messages to me on the subject at hand, the decision for the Origins Awards to drop a category for PBM games, following my inquiry to you about that possibility.

I know that you were always a strong advocate for PBM companies taking a more active interest in the former Origins Award for PBM games.

PBM gaming isn't actually dead, of course. Gamers still play PBM games, though perhaps not in the numbers that they once did. Even still, it just strikes me as an odd thing for Origins to choose to discontinue an award for a category of gaming that can't be uninvented, and which people are still active participants thereof.

Origins carried a certain degree of heft in the gaming community - and still does, to be certain. Even still, perhaps this turn of events, sad as it is, could still lead to a positive outcome for the PBM community and industry.

On the one hand, no sense in crying

over spilled milk, and especially since none of us can control what Origins as an entity decides to do.

On the other hand, Origins doesn't hold a monopoly upon the creation or bestowing of awards. I dare say that a lot of people in PBM circles were never overly impressed with how Origins approached PBM gaming, for award and recognition purposes.

Pushback isn't always a bad thing. Heck, this magazine is an exercise in pushback, itself. Maybe PBM gaming could stand to do with a lot more pushback, in fact.

I understand - and appreciate - your frustration, Rick. You catch it, both coming and going.

At one point in time, I suspect that the Origins Award for PBM was a much bigger deal than it seems to have devolved into over an extended period of time. If PBM companies weren't taking an active and energetic interest in submitting their own games for consideration for the Origins PBM Award, then there's likely actual reasons why that eventually became the status quo.

Maybe it's high time that the PBM gaming industry and community came up with a new award system. Personally, I think that's a very

viable option, one that has at least some degree of merit.

I invite discussion on the subject by our readership and by game companies and game moderators of the PBM and lineal descendants communities.

Charles

=====

Received it! We'll get this answered and back to you, ASAP!

Debbie Leonard

Advanced Gaming Enterprises

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Debbie,

I look forward to your company's forthcoming interview responses - as do many others, I'm sure.

Charles

=====



** Takamo Universe team at WorldCon promoting upcoming book series with Kevin J. Anderson.*

FALLEN EMPIRES



Lead your tribe to glory, run a mercenary company, build the strongest settlement or be a political master on the continent of Clantium in Fallen Empires - a play by email Role play/Strategy game.

Fallen Empires is a Role Playing game by email. Each turn you, the player, send in your instructions as to movement, actions etc. to the Games Master (GM). The instructions are partly in the form of calculations on a spread sheet, and partly in the form of written instructions.

Email us at for more details: fallenemp@gmail.com

Or look at our Facebook page: <http://goo.gl/2rKO5Q>

Or read some of our Battle, Historical or Alliance reports: http://www.scribd.com/james_perrin_9

The Proverbial Last Minute

A Mad Rush of Late Hour Additions

ALAMAZE News Brief: August, 2016

Lots of happenings in the [World of Alamaze](#). We'll just cover a few of the top stories.

3rd Cycle: The Choosing debuts.

After two years of development, we released the exciting new version of Alamaze that has so many innovations it became the first new "Cycle", rather than a new 2nd Cycle scenario. 12 brand new kingdoms for a total of 24 available, such as The Necromancer, The Illusionist, The Amazons, the Atlantians, The Nomads, The Lizard King. All play differently, enjoy unique aspects across the board in political, military, economic, covert and magical components. One of dozens of innovations include the concept of kingdom Traits. 22 cultural traits such as Oratory, Military Tradition, Industrious, Cunning, Sea Faring. With 24 available kingdoms and 12 active in a given game, there are over 1000 possible combinations.

Advent of New Two Player DUEL

format. On the new, smaller, beautiful Centauria map. DUEL allows two players to each select any of the 24 available kingdoms, and have a mano e mano challenge in a quick, 3 turns a week contest with a maximum of 18 turns and the full cost of the game is \$11.95. Also a great way

for new players to learn the game.

Brand New Web-based Interface.

May not sound sexy, but experienced PBM players know how important the ease of use interfacing with the game and having all the information you need to play right there at your interface is. No multiple forms to fill out, interactive, terrific order checker, organizes the commands by clear category, knows how to verify the use of spells and artifacts as well as the commands. Knows the map and where your forces and characters can move, tracks your resources, you can verify orders as often as desired. All rules available there as well. Great stuff.

Alamaze Resurgent Zooms by 200

Games Begun Since 2013. So a little over one game a week of Alamaze is started on average. We run two turns a week and a one game at a time plan (Scout Level Service) remains just \$19.95, so a little over \$2 a turn. Have held prices at initial levels despite the innovations across the board.

If you tried ALAMAZE before, this is a great time to return and see how far we have come from when ALAMAZE won the Origins and GAMA Game of the Year awards, and was enthusiastically endorsed by Dragon Magazine. It's something you'll want to experience. If you haven't tried ALAMAZE before, the interface makes it quite a bit easier to

get started. Returning players send an email to signup@alamaze.co, new players register easily for an account at the game website www.alamaze.co. See you in Alamaze!

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[Takamo Universe](#) has partnered with Kevin J. Anderson and other authors to publish a series of novels based on the back story of Takamo Universe. The first novel is set for release in late October.

A crowdfund campaign on [Indiegogo](#) will launch in October to fund additional novels, novellas and short stories in the series. There are also plans to publish several technical manuals detailing starship designs, weapons and aliens.

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Rules for Quest of the Great Jewels, 3rd Edition

<http://www.stampsbythemes.com/qj/qjr/ules3.pdf>

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We are pleased to announce that Kgruppe LLC, the developer of Takamo Universe, has joined forces with best selling science fiction author Kevin J. Anderson to publish a series of Takamo Universe novels based upon the Takamo Universe back story. The first novel is set for release in late October of this year. Visit our website for more updates at www.takamouniverse.com.

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Thanks, as always, for thinking of me, but this really is a dead duck. I just don't see the upside in expending further effort on an archaic hobby like play-by-mail. It had its moment, like 8-track tapes and pogs and so many other things. Even the offer of a free "exhibition" game of Galac-Tac didn't draw enough players. Sometimes a void is meant to be a void.

Bob McLain

06/29/2016

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[Slow Gaming](#)

A discussion thread started by Bob McLain in which he says, "A nice hook, if ever there was one: Play-by-Mail - The Original Slow Gaming Experience."

08/16/2016

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Editor's Note: I included the last two entries, above, because I think that they effectively showcase the enduring interest that exists in PBM gaming, even as many of us are apt to write off play by mail gaming as being dead.

If PBM is really and truly dead, though, then I think that it is very interesting how new discussion threads about the subject still get started - *even after such pronouncements*. Now, if we could only tap into all of Bob's PBM memories.

God bless PBM gaming and Bob McLain!



COME TO ALAMAZE!

- The **preeminent Fantasy Wargame** has started over 200 games since The Resurgence in 2013: a new game beginning about every week.
- We released the fantastically updated 3rd Cycle: The Choosing in 2016. Choose from 24 unique, exciting kingdoms, each playing distinctly. In a 12 player game, 12 kingdoms are selected by the 12 players, creating **over 1000 possible kingdom combinations** in any one game.
- Enjoy planning your strategy while each turn selecting from about 100 available commands, about 100 spells, and discover about 70 artifacts while considering all the **many special qualities of your kingdom**.
- New for 2016, Alamaze has a state of the art web based interface that greatly simplifies order entry, provides about **flawless order checking**, tracks resources, stores all your turn results, organized by game.
- Alamaze offers a variety of formats, from our latest innovation, the two-player DUEL! format on the new Centauria map (challenge your friend or learn the game there), 4, 5, and the most popular **12 player contests**.
- Alamaze remains **an incredible bargain**: join at our Scout Level Service for \$19.95 monthly. We run games twice weekly on the dot, so usually 9 turns a month or \$2.21 a turn. What? Compare that to the competition.

Visit our website and join at www.alamaze.co (not com); learn more about the game at our forum with 30k posts at: <http://kingdomsofarcania.net/forum/>