

Suspense & Decision

MARCH
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5





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65 spells

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More Info Next Issue!

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SUSPENSE & DECISION

ISSUE # 5

March 2014

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With this issue, we welcome aboard our new assistant editor, Bernd Jaehnigen. Bernd joined the Suspense & Decision team just a few days before the publication deadline for Issue # 5, so his impact upon the publication hasn't even really begun to be felt or seen, yet.

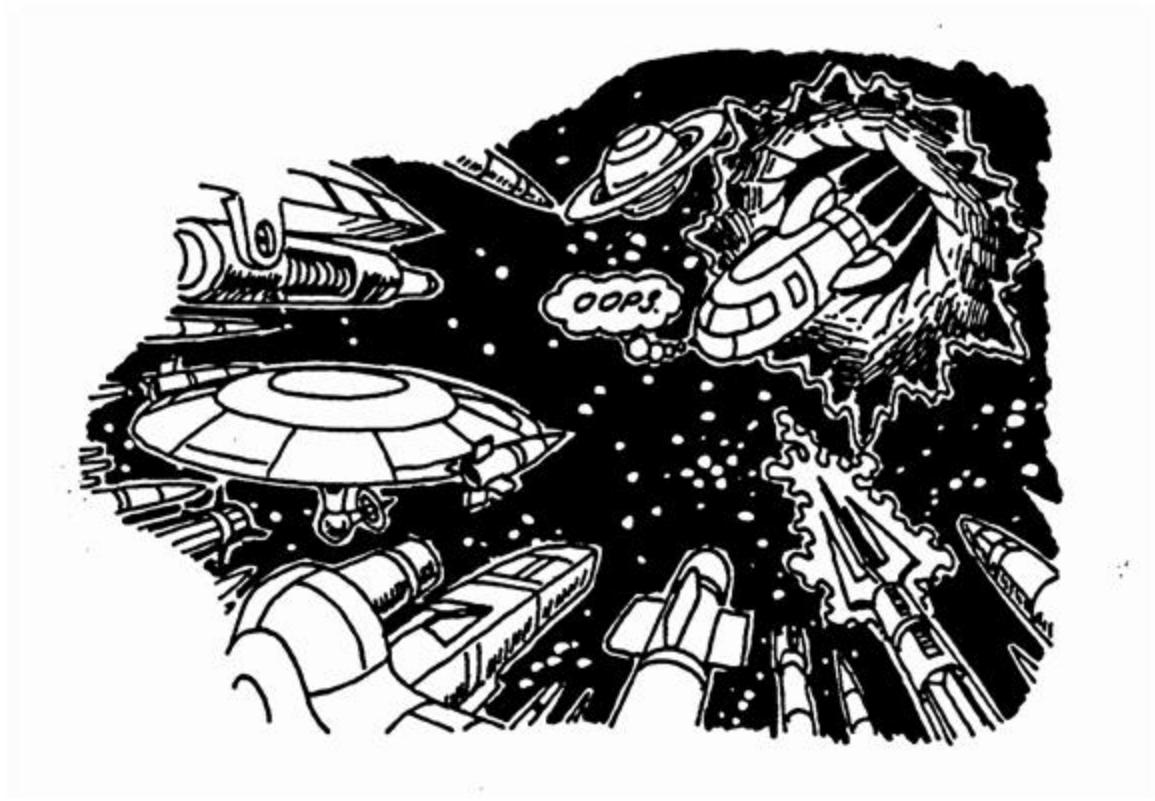
This month has seen less free time available to me, to cobble things together. Even still, I hope that you enjoy this issue, all the same.

We have several of what I now consider to be our regular contributors returning with articles, this issue, along with some new faces on the authorship front bringing us some new articles for your reading pleasure.

It would be wonderful to bring a few additional artists on board. If you're interested, send me an email at: GrimFinger@GrimFinger.Net

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GALAC-TAC



GALAC-TAC is a classic game of galactic conquest, bringing fun and challenge to the PBM world since 1982. Claim your place in the galaxy, and develop and defend it with ships of your own design. After more than three decades in play, now skip the postage stamp and enter your game orders online! Download optional "game assistant" software to help you manage the details. Play solo against the computer for fun or "practice", or be part of a live game with 10-15 human players. New customization options are available for number of players, turnaround time, and more. Set up a private game, or be part of a game open to all. Who occupies the second star on the right? Send in your scout and see, or charge in with weapons blasting!

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Galactic Encounters of the PBM Kind

GALAC-TAC Returns

Genny White

Long ago, in a PBM galaxy not so far away, I was invited to play a game with a bunch of close friends. It was Galac-Tac, which had been in circulation since 1982 and had been played by hundreds of gamers. I had the opportunity to play with its creators and beta-testers, and had a blast. Fast-forward to 2010, when I found myself one of the new owners of the game (and its parent company, Talisman Games). My husband Davin Church, our associate Doug Neman, and I took what was already a pretty great game "on paper" and began moving it to the web. Gone are the postage stamps and hand-entered orders mailed to the game's operators (although that COULD be arranged!), but the basic concepts of the game are still there.

When you begin a game, you find yourself with a quadrant map (basically saying "You Are Here"), a report with a small handful of ships (a starter kit of exploratory scouts, colonizing cargo vessels, and defenses for your Home World), and the knowledge that out there somewhere in a vast galaxy are ten or so other players with the same starting info for *their* Home Worlds, and an eager appetite for the territory around *you*. So the challenge begins... you type up your orders and send your scouts out to evaluate

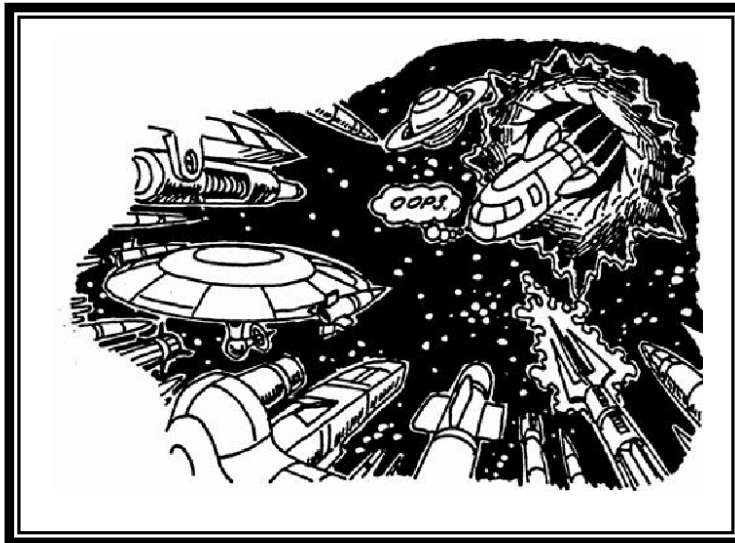
the neighborhood and stake your claims, develop new resources, build more ships, and eventually run into the other guys and test your theories of economic planning, ship design and fleet construction.

Our new interface is still in Beta-testing, but we've played test games and seem to have most of the bugs worked out. When time

permits, we tinker with the web page to add new features. It's fairly "bare bones" right now, but it still beats writing down your orders and mailing them to the GM! The website lets you enter your orders (offering some general purpose suggestions for rookies), and now

provides a ship-designing utility. There are also star maps available on the website, to give you a glance at the current state of the universe. Our instruction manual is more or less the original one from the 1980s, and certainly needs some updating, but it is basically accurate and covers the basics of game play well. It will be my job to clean that up eventually, whenever I find that elusive creature "free time".

One of the best tools for players is the downloadable GTAC (Galac-Tac Assistant) program, which has a *lot* of nifty features that haven't made it to the web yet. You can



use GTAC to develop your strategies, analyze your fleets and economic structure, and view or print elaborate customizable color maps. GTAC's extensive mapping utilities let you pick custom colors for every empire, and design your choice of symbols to identify the status of the stars you've explored. It's quite amazing. (Read: "Knocks your socks off, compared to a plain ol' black and white sheet of paper.") Order entry in GTAC includes error-checking your orders *before* submitting them to the website, and letting you type in future orders to keep your game strategy flowing. When you're ready, GTAC sends your orders up to the website. Then you download your next turn report from the site and let GTAC update all your data. Saves a lot of wear and tear on the old pencil.

The initial period of the game, when everyone is bumping into each other for the first time, discovering the value of their local stars, and starting to establish trade routes and borders, is my favorite time. I'm not as good at creating effective ship designs and building balanced fleets, but of course it's very satisfying when I make a decision to go for something and get that report back saying I at least survived the attempt! Although the distribution of stars is random when a new game is initialized, there is a fairly even chance for everyone to have a good balance of valuable territory within a turn or two of home, and Home Worlds are always at least a minimum distance apart. So, off you go, hoping to be the first one to find and claim the best of the stars in your area, before the neighbors come calling.

At the beginning, I wanted to name every star I colonized, and every ship I built. However, near the end of my last game, I owned about 181 stars plus a dozen PCs (Production Centers). I couldn't keep track of

that many names for all the colonies. Likewise, I had hundreds of little fighters, scouts, and cargo vessels (2,261 ships in all), and generating names for them would be too tedious. So, I just used generic names for those, set them on regular routes or joined them into fleets, and just focused on the big picture. When we were playing with our friends, part of the fun was trying to hide our identity as long as possible. We all knew each other, with our play styles and strengths and weaknesses, so we'd come up with an empire name and maybe name our PCs, major ships, and design classifications something that went with the theme, and see how long we could remain anonymous. Other players didn't see the names of our stars or ships unless they beat 'em up, so we were just the Mysterious Folks Next Door until actual conflict began.

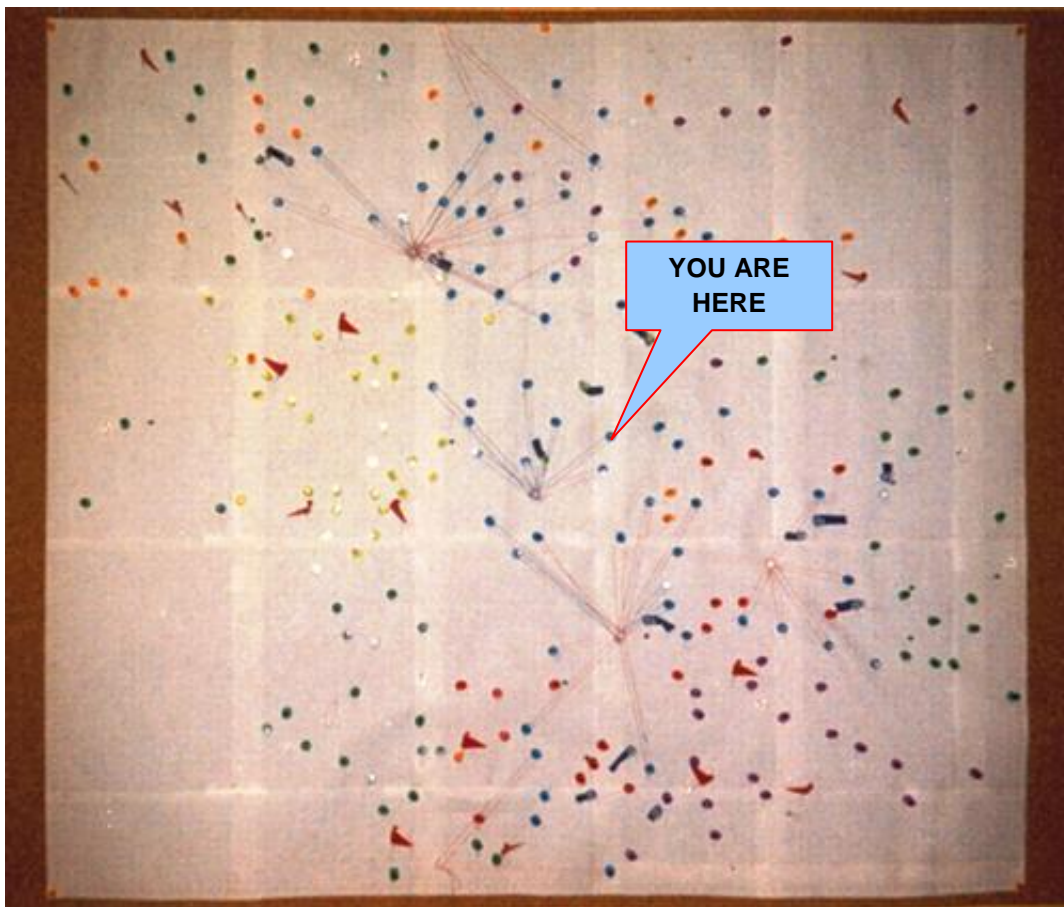
I went nuts with maps in the old days. Back in the early 90s, I printed a huge wall-size map several feet across, attached it to a cork board and hung it on the wall, and then used colored push-pins to represent all the different empires I encountered. I tied thread in a loop from my own colonies to the PCs they fed to represent my supply routes. It was gorgeous. I think I still have that map somewhere, sans pins and threads of course. The one-page quadrant maps are much more practical for keeping on your desk to scribble on, and a new one can be printed any time you need it. I still kept the colored pencils handy when the turn reports came in, so I could see at a glance where everyone was (everyone I had run into so far, that is). The GTAC program came along later, which made my old wall map pretty obsolete, but boy, it was fun!

In addition to all the handy stuff GTAC lets me do, I also used to maintain several spreadsheets to keep track of which colonies

belonged to which Production Centers, where my major fleets were and what their composition was, what ships I was building and where and when they would be completed (BIG ships can take multiple turns), etc. That last game fizzled out in 2010 when I just got too busy to keep it up. I was winning... but the last remaining player wasn't going down easy. I don't recall how I got in that exalted position. I'm pretty sure it was Davin's tactics and advice, and I just kept up the clerical end of the game. It has always been great to play as a team with a more experienced player. (But it sure is fun to blow up your spouse, or plot against the younger generation. Remember, the family that slays together, stays together!)

Life certainly gets in the way of gaming, sometimes... I haven't been able to play for quite a while now. But thanks to the renewed interest being generated by this great little publication, I've certainly got the "itch". Perhaps you're in the mood for some galactic conquest, Gentle Reader. Grab some friends and sign up for a new game at www.talisman-games.com. You can even play solo against the computer, which lets you get a feel for the game and try stuff out before you encounter other human players, which we highly recommend. (I assume your friends are human...) Then get ready for the real thing – your Home World glimmers in the midst of the Great Unknown, ready to be the center of a huge and triumphant empire!

Maybe I'll see you out there.



Map of the Domain of the White Star

(My 1990s push-pin-enhanced Galac-Tac wall map.)



ALAMAZE

www.ALAMAZE.co (not .com)

April, 2013 kicked off the return of Alamaze and our players are having a blast. Dozens of new Alamaze games have started in the past few months in our five active formats in what we collectively call Alamaze Classic. They have made more than 9000 posts in over 600 threads in that time on our [Players' Forum](#). Visit it to see the action and the many topics.

Players receive attractively formatted results (including graphics) in PDF files and players are enjoying getting their results within a few hours after the turn deadline, consistently. Turns currently are on a twice-a-week cycle which players love and fees are kept low by our new monthly subscription plans that can equate to less than \$2.00 a turn (our Warrior Level Service is \$26.95 for about 14 turns a month in two games) instead of the old \$7.50: quite a difference! See a sample turn result and kingdom dossier on our website: [What is Alamaze?](#)

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A Sunburst of Hope

For a Bright Future of PBEM Games

Rick McDowell



I suspect most PBEM gamers played AD&D in their younger days. What a triumph that most innovative game was: maybe the first game with any groundswell and sophistication to be played almost entirely in the imagination. Also, perhaps a beginning of the larger meta-game concept, where a game is not just a game, but characters, places, and events go on from one game session to the next, and so forth, on for years of memorable enjoyment.

And I bet most PBEM game *designers* played and drew inspiration from lots of board games growing up and into their adulthood, for as long as they might squeeze them into their new schedules in life. That was another notable contribution of PBEM – fitting into life's "other" demands of its players.

I'm curious though about how many among us are aware of the resurgence of board games, a ripple that has hit the USA recently - and still somewhat covertly - but one that is a full wave in Europe. Called designer games (because the designer's name is prominent, not hidden) or German board games, this is a new era of creativity and quality overtaking the nearly dismissed

genre of sophisticated board games, as opposed to beer (white zinfandel?) and pretzels games like Apples to Apples or old dice-oriented luck games like Monopoly. They are not inexpensive.

A premier example many of us may have heard of and perhaps played is Settlers of Catan, by Reiner Knizia. Rather than go into any depth on this particular game, basically it has many qualities that work for it and others of its kind in this innovative gaming genre:

- Creative design concepts, rather than a re-spin of old ideas;
- Attractive components;
- Playable generally in about two hours;
- Not necessarily directing toward player conflict but for parts of the game, cooperation;
- Plenty of replay value and multiple successful strategies;
- Playing the opponents as much as the game mechanics;
- "Just right" in terms of complexity: not dumbed down like most American family board games, or jacked up unnecessarily as in grognard games;
- Builds loyalty and word of mouth.

Look how these things draw together a future for what PBEM has and still does best:

- A game for a limited number of players, played at their convenience;
- Rewarding innovation and replayability;
- Demonstrates a market for games that are not dumbed-down;
- Emphasizes quality and elegance of design: use one rule to cover multiple possibilities, not a different rule for each – the burden is on the designer,

- not the player to make the game accessible to an interested player;
- Quality of experience – attractive results, anticipation for the results, competing against human adults and not AI, building loyalty /word of mouth.

So let the innovative PBEM companies and those brave souls willing to risk their own money to build a company to offer new games in the near future take heart – there is a market returning for more challenging gaming fare, independent of computer graphics and still offering human interaction beyond a text blip.

It's a challenge to PBEM designers, but also our best opportunity to begin our own renaissance.

The Diplomatic Pouch

Diplomacy: The art of keeping cool.
--William Jennings Bryan

Since 1995 The Diplomatic Pouch has been the flagship publication of the Diplomacy hobby. Trusted for news, information and strategy and tactics articles, read the Pouch today. New issues five times a year.

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Game: **ALAMAZE** Web Site: www.alamaze.co Forum: www.kingdomsofarcania.net

Genre: **Epic Fantasy** Turn Frequency: once per 4 days

Game Length: Up to 40 turns (or previous victory: games generally last about 4 months on average)

Pricing: Monthly subscription of \$19.95 per month, for about seven turns (about 100 pages of results in pdf format) per month. More games available simultaneously at higher service levels.

Alamaze is the preeminent PBEM strategy game of epic fantasy. Winner of numerous Game-of-the-Year Awards, including Origins, GAMA, and reader polls by Flagship and Paper Mayhem magazines. It was critically acclaimed by Dragon Magazine (#131) as one of the finest game designs in *any* genre.

Choose to become the undisputed leader of a legendary kingdom. Compete and cooperate with fourteen diabolical human rulers. Embark on an epic quest for dominion over Alamaze. Here you will guide your noble court of princes, dukes, counts and barons to execute your diplomacy and political objectives. With objectives in mind and targets in sight, command your network of spies and agents. Develop the awesome magical powers of your important and limited cadre of spellcasters and discuss with them the best application of their talents. Yes, you have experienced military commanders as well, who will grow in their tactical expertise as the campaign advances. They command your armies - each army composition unique to their kingdom. Equip leaders, agents or wizards with powerful artifacts such as *The Gem of the Planes* and *Elan; Flaming Sword of the North*, recovered from the lairs of legendary monsters in the wild. Gain a seat on the exclusive Alamaze High Council, reveal skeletons in the closet on your hated rivals, recruit and gain the divinations of a High Priestess of Alamaze. Plan to achieve your kingdom's Early Strategic Objective, and from there, go on to achieve victory in a variety of ways, including The Rex, The Lion's Share, and Secret Victory.

The 15 Kingdoms of Alamaze Classic Steel (each player will play the part of one of these):

(full names and descriptions at <http://www.alamaze.co/the-fantasy-kingdoms>):

The Ancient Ones: A small cadre of very impressive and unique individuals preferring to work secretly.

The Black Dragons: The fastest moving forces, more in tune with humans than their larger cousins.

The Dark Elves: More covert and fanatically bent and perhaps more magical than their hated rivals.

The Demon Princes: Things weren't bad enough before? Maybe the most unique fantasy kingdom ever.

The Dwarven Lords: Expert with stone and gold, they also have political clout, and mountain prowess.

The High Elves: No introduction needed. A very balanced kingdom with good geography.

The Stone Giants: Powerful race centrally positioned. Everyone says they want to be their friend.

The Gnomes: Consumed with alchemy, they cherish all magic. A portal they seek to attack the Dwarves.

The Rangers: A fun kingdom with multiple lines of strategy possible requiring skillful play in all facets.

The Red Dragons: A fire-breathing pure military with great mobility and ultimate big-stick diplomacy.

The Sorcerer: Maybe the kingdom with the most spellcasters and the best mid-level spells.

The Trolls: Big, mean, strong, regenerative, feared, and not that bright. The most role-played kingdom.

The Underworld: Pirates, assassins, thieves, dealers in extortion, subterfuge, and information. Popular.

The Warlock: Best battle magic, lowest magic research cost. Geographically central, diplomacy needed.

The Witchlord: Rumor has it he is the most powerful mage, and destined to rule all of Alamaze.

Players old and new have discovered the resurgent Alamaze, returning in 2013 with a new map of Alamaze, new rulebooks, pdf results, website, active community through the player forum, and same day help if needed through email. Now under the direction of its original and multiple Origins Game of the Year Award winning designer, it is developing a fast following of new and returning enthusiasts.

New games form in various formats, including games exclusively for new or newly returning players!

VISIT & SIGNUP AT [HTTP://WWW.ALAMAZE.CO/SIGN-UP/](http://www.alamaze.co/sign-up/)

Duel2: An Overview

Mark G. Manley



"Gladiator, I am your beginning and your end. Your life and ultimately your death, are mine to decide. You may say your soul belongs to your gods, but you are mistaken. It belongs to me." **A Manager quote.**

Welcome to the world of [Duel 2](#), a play-by-mail fantasy gladiatorial game created by Reality Simulations, Inc. (RSI). In *Duel 2* (D2) you are the titleholder of five powerful gladiators. You decide who fights, who lives, and who dies by your command. As manager, you choose each gladiator's permanent fighting style, between five offensive and five defensive forms. Then you and you alone determine their weapons, armor, and strategy on how they battle and ultimately win in a one-on-one match against other player's warriors.

The D2 world of Alastari is a riveting and thriving realm that has even inspired a novel, *Dark Arena* by Mark G. Manley, available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), set in this reality. Four main regions divide Alastari, each dotted with city-states and this is where you manage your gladiator stable.

The first region in the north is the Andorian League whose armies fiercely guard its rich, prosperous, and fertile land from any and all conquerors. The second region in the south is the duplicitous Delarquian Federation, whose

land is said only fit to produce rocks. While the Delarquans are known for their frequent internal squabbling, it would be a naive notion to believe their eyes have turned away from its neighbor in the north waiting for any weakness and a reason to unite and invade. The third region in the far east of Alastari is a smaller province holding no alliance with either the Andorians or Delarquans, called the Free Blade nations. The Free Bladers farm where they can, hunt when possible, and raid caravans, as necessary, on both sides. The fourth region is Lirith Kai in the southwest far off from Alastari. Called the Swordsman Empire, it's known for its elaborate code of honor and duty of its warriors. There is little news directly from Lirith Kai that reaches Alastari, so there is still much about the land to discover.

One great aspect of *Duel2* for starting managers is it doesn't matter if this is your first turn or your one-thousand, as gladiators are paired up based on rankings. This will prevent Sir Robin the Brave from matching up against Conan the Barbarian.

Another is in many cases you will come to love your gladiators and nurture them to the top spot in the city, the Duellmaster. While survival is not guaranteed, fights are normally called and a victor declared prior

to a warrior's death. However, please note your opponent's kill desire does play a factor. In addition, once your gladiator has reached the pinnacle of fighting glory, they will receive an invite to the Isle of the Eye to fight in the Advance Duelmasters (ADM) games. There Lady Shelia Greywand will disclose the warriors favorite weapon, fighting rhythm, and more importantly granted immortality. While death could find them in ADM, Lady Shelia Greywand will use her powers to resurrect them, so they can fight in the next turn and continue their training and growth

On the flip side, there will be gladiators in your stable that you loathe. Whether due to their inability to win or you just plain don't like them. In these situations, you don't have to suffer the dead weight and you can send them to the Dark Arena, aka the DA. A DA fight is to the death against a ferocious monster. While the odds are against the gladiator in a DA match, they can win. If they survive, I would highly recommend reconsidering sending them back. However, for any death that occurs on the sands, RSI will send a replacement gladiator for free.

Another great aspect is the Duel2 community. Mature in nature, they are very friendly and will be more than happy to share their knowledge with new managers and help suggest designs for your warriors, just ask. Post your question in the forums at www.reality.com/dm and fellow managers will provide different options as to what to do with them. The forums are also a great source of knowledge on designing gladiators and coming up with strategies.

Besides two optional mail-in tournaments annually, including a Tournament of the Dead for those favorite warriors lost on the sands a chance to come back, RSI also hosts

twice a year a Face-to-Face Tournament. This is when managers from around the country meet and play Duel 2. This is a great time to share strategies, discuss rivalries, and hear the wailing and gnashing of teeth as your warrior defeats theirs in live competition.

Finally, there is a very unique aspect of Duel 2 in this digital age. There is nothing like the feeling of seeing the RSI envelope in your mail box with your latest turn. Many a bill has been cast aside with the anticipation of reading your fight results line by line, what stats are trained, or skills learned for each warrior fought. Each win is a bragging right, while a loss an opportunity to see what went wrong, so the next time on the sands, the outcome may be different. Afterward, a manager can peruse your city's newsletter, providing how other stables did and the wins/losses/kills tallied. Besides learning whom the Duelmaster is, who fights for free, you will see if your stable or gladiator captured any of the other ranking titles earning a free fight for the next turn. It is also an opportunity for players to write personal ads or spotlights on their stables and how they are impacting their city. Periodically, RSI introduces world events in Alastari, anything from an invasion of the Rirorni horde to the opening of Chaos Gates in the land. RSI invites all managers to write how these events affect their city or their gladiator stable.

Getting started is easy. RSI bequeaths your five gladiators for free by requesting a roll-up at www.reality.com. Try a turn or two and you may find yourself cheering and watching your gladiator turn from a novice on the sands to the next Duelmaster of the games.

May victory be your eternal companion!



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At Face Value

A look at the Facebook numbers

March 18th, 2014

Facebook Page	# of Likes
Flying Buffalo, Inc.	1,389 Likes (+13)
Empires at War 1805	341 Likes (+7)
Takamo Universe	208 Likes (+26)
Clash of Legends	108 Likes (+4)
Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire	89 Likes (+3)
Starweb	82 Likes (0)
Diplomacy on USAK	82 Likes (N/A)
Duel2	63 Likes (0)
Rolling Thunder Games	65 Likes (+2)
Fallen Empires PBE	38 Likes (0)
Rimworlds	35 Likes (+1)
Galactic Prisoners	27 Likes (0)
Alamaze	26 Likes (+1)
It's a Crime	24 Likes (0)
PlayByMail.Net	9 Likes (N/A)

March 18th, 2014

Facebook Discussion Group	# of members
Hyborian War	52 members (-1)
Middle-Earth PBM	47 members (+1)
Phoenix BSE	35 members (-1)
Forgotten Realms	35 members (0)
Legends	30 members (+4)
Starfleet Warlord	26 members (+1)
Science Fiction Writers and Artists Group for Takamo Universe	24 members (+1)
Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive	22 members (0)
Lands of Nevron	19 members (0)
Duel2	9 members (+1)
Fall of Rome	2 members (0)
Play By Mail Games	1 member (0)

*** NOTE:** The numbers in parenthesis reflects increases, decreases, and maintaining of the status quo since the previous issue. N/A denotes an entry that was added, this issue.

USING PLAY BY MAIL IN A NOVEL'S PLOT

THE STORY BEHIND FOR THE LOVE OF AIRAGOS

Shannon Muir

I got my start writing articles for the Play by Mail magazines during the 1990s. While some reviewed games, or looked at overall analyses of the play landscape such as women in PBM, the work I was best known for was Play by Mail based fiction. In these works, I took my turns and the personas used in them, and fleshed them out into characters and situations. My mind would think about if these were actual people, in the environment described in the rulebooks by the Game Masters, how would they react to the situations? More importantly, what kind of life did they have outside of those situations?

After the death of Mr. Webber and the unexpected folding of PAPER MAYHEM, my writing and playing in the field trickled off – briefly resurfacing in the e-magazine, SABLEDRAKE, after meeting its publisher Christine Morgan, an opportunity which allowed me to wrap up the storyline that abruptly stopped – and eventually ended. Additionally, working in the Hollywood entertainment industry didn't leave much time for gaming. By the time things settled down for me, my favorite games came to an end, and I wasn't finding anything on the market that interested me at the time. So, I stopped playing. It would be 2008 when, through a referral of a co-worker, I would become introduced to Massively Multiplayer Online Games. These allowed me to solo and fit my schedule, or sometimes games with others, as well.

That said, Play by Mail never left my heart.

Starting around 2005, I started taking up a challenge called "National Novel Writing Month" – NaNoWriMo as it is known for short – where participants have to write a 50,000 word first draft novel in one month. I have successfully completed the November challenge yearly, since I began (they do a Camp NaNoWriMo twice a year, where participants can cater their goals, and I actually didn't do well that particular July). This is applicable to Play by Mail, because in 2010, I decided to try for something slightly different. While staying in the realm of the women's fiction style I'd come to work on over the past few years, I challenged myself with a premise. Especially given the number of female gamers that have become more noted in the past twenty years, could I successfully write a piece of women's fiction with Play by Mail woven into it?

Chasing that one question, that's how my 2010 work for NaNoWriMo came to be. The original working title was THE PAPER TRAIL, which I coined since the story revolved around a group of friends who started with an ongoing role playing game, which their Dungeon Master tried to continue by postal mail, until he mysteriously disappeared. There are mysterious messages in the final turns that, starting with several of them meeting up in a Massively Multiplayer Online Game years later after being out of touch, that they start piecing together.

By the time the first draft was done, the story ended up going in some directions far different than I'd originally expected. In particular, an entire alien race became introduced as part of the bigger mystery, one for which I'd planned absolutely no backstory! I knew I'd have to revisit the story from page one, at some point. Life, however, went such a way I could not take a look, again, for some time. Once I settled on a back history for my alien race, I tried to start documenting it as a chapter story on the book readers site, Goodreads, where I have an author page. For a variety of reasons that had nothing to do with the story, I never finished that endeavor. Every now and then, I would dabble at starting to edit THE PAPER TRAIL manuscript to match my notes, but I never made it a priority to finish. Other things got in the way.

Flash forward to late February 2014, where my work slowed enough, and I finally felt like taking a look at the book, again. I completed editing the manuscript and released it in March 2014, but under a new title. I needed a title that fit more of the women's fiction component, as well as evoked references related to the alien race that is also part of the story. The title changed to FOR THE LOVE OF AIRAGOS.

So, now I have come full circle, back to the inspiration which got me started writing for publication, but in a far different way. As I said earlier, relationships are front and center in this story. Certain subplots involving women and pregnancy show up as a lot of my works in this vein seem to, but a lot of the dramatic aspects very much mirror the later entries in some of my game-based Play by Mail fiction work. FOR THE LOVE OF AIRAGOS is definitely not Fred Saberhagen's OCTAGON. However, what I think the book does represent is a celebration of social

gaming in its various forms through contemporary history.

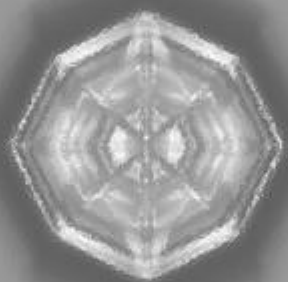
When I interact in Massively Multiplayer Games with others and mention Play by Mail, many don't have any idea what I'm talking about. In their minds, it seems that gaming skips right from Role Playing Games to today's big massive player experiences. Play by Mail is an important piece of that history, and should not be forgotten, especially since some of us are still doing it. As for myself, I recently returned to the scene last year, joining the long running game, [RENAISSANCE](#), by Constantine Xanthos; my father has been in it for many years and I finally felt myself ready, after years of hearing his stories about the game, to take on the challenges of (admittedly slightly altered) historical game play. By no means is FOR THE LOVE OF AIRAGOS earth shattering in changing things, but it does indirectly inform a new generation of what is not yet a lost art.

If you are interested, FOR THE LOVE OF AIRAGOS is currently available in e-book form at major retailers such as [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), [Apple](#), and [Smashwords](#).

SHANNON MUIR is a second generation PBM gamer, as the older daughter of John C. Muir. In addition to writing fiction and textbooks on animation, she's written for animation and worked in production capacities for various animated series from studios such as Nickelodeon, Sony, and SD Entertainment. Her experience also involves production and project experience on the Neopets properties, including being part of the initial launch team behind the kids MMOG Petpet Park.

For the Love of Airagos

For the Love of Airagos



Part of the  Collection

Shannon Muir

Heather grew up playing RPGs with her friend Abe and a group of college friends. One day he mysteriously disappeared, but tried to keep the game going as Play By Mail turns - until one day those turns also mysteriously stopped. Years later, she's put in contact with friends old and new who learn they've been pieces in a larger game for a race from another world to come to Earth...

"Yes?" I replied, not sure what he wanted.

"I know it's a long shot, but did you by any chance keep the rulebook that the Dungeon Master wrote for that play by mail game? I can't remember the game flavor."

"It's in my suitcase," I told him. "Not like we can get to it at the moment. I did read it before I came down. Can't

think of anything that immediately might help though."

Izzy finally chimed in.

"You want me to go run off and save a fantasy world with you? Are you mad?"

Vardierus looked over at Izzy.

"We need you as part of our group," he insisted.

Pick up your copy today!

phoenix



BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

<http://www.phoenixbse.com>

'Ere be pirates

Gath-Edhoras

Phoenix News Flash!

Pirates are one of the biggest threats in-game that the majority of people encounter, and consist of both NPC and PC ships. Often, deadlocks in big affiliation power politics cause the players to tiptoe around, hesitant to carry out an action, for fear of retaliation. In these circumstances, pirates or covert operations can become the only way to hurt or damage an opponent - and let's be honest, they are also fun (when they work - which is a biiiigg caveat).

As an example of this, in the past, an independent named 'Johnny Alpha' led a large, high quality force of mercenary ships into the Halo periphery, and targeted heavily the AFT (Arthur Daley's in space) and the DTR (politicians with a big warfleet). The suspicion was that Alpha was being backed by a larger affiliation in secret, specifically to hurt a very restricted group of players...

Eventually, the AFT found Alpha's secret base, and a large force of DTR and AFT ships moved to attack - and just as the attack was about to be launched, Alpha switched control of all of his assets to another major human affiliation of very dubious morals (the FET - think Russian Mafia or Yakuza). Cue much shouting and threats of larger war. This did not occur, but Alpha's henchman, Gronk, thereafter spent several months trying to rescue his master from prison, with admittedly little success. One of my favourite tactics that he used, was to park an unarmed freighter in orbit of a major DTR base, and to blare out 'Free Johnny Alpha'

over the communication nets including the system message received when ships entered. The DTR let him do this for a while, though may, in the end, have ended that particular broadcast a little aggressively.

That though is the political side of pirating, and the game allows for this by a proliferation of flags of convenience, ranging from Pirate (everyone will attack you on sight, but you can attack anyone, anywhere) through Mercenary, Free Trader, Privateer and Independent (in decreasing ability to do nasty stuff, but also, in terms of threat to the more established affiliations). These flags allow players to carry out actions that would have caused inordinately large paybacks to their own affiliation, with much less risk. Though, to be frank, the default position with many affiliations is that any ship without a designated known affiliation is automatically suspect of being a secret pirate/criminal.

The game also has a few pure pirates, of whom the most famous is currently the infamous Pirate Large. Pirating is a high skilled operation that requires strong nerves and an absolute mastery of combat tactics. Pirates have no true friends, and so, have to operate clandestinely. Usually, a small base is set up on an asteroid or a gas giant, with little or no resources. The pirate creates a small base, here, that can repair and refit his ships. This is, also, where his pirate ships hide. These are usually very fast, but with little armour - pirates are not usually out to take on warships). Often, they carry very

large numbers of Warbot (battle droids) and troops. The pirate then scans common rings (rings and sectors provide a shorthand syntax for your location and movement within space - since most ships can only jump from ring 10 to 12 you can often find ships moving through these) using very small scout ships, or if they are being really cheeky, then using a ship from a different affiliation to scout. It is very expensive to set up as a pirate, and most of the successful pirates have been 'seeded' by parent affiliations in the past.

Anyway, once the pirate finds a ship loitering, then the following day, one or more of the assault ships launches. It will jump to the exact ring and system, and attempt to board the ship in question. Allowing it is still there, this usually works, as traders, by definition, do not overload on defensive troops, because it hurts profit and reduces space. Success or failure is immaterial, and the ship will always jump back to its base in the same action, minimising time spent visible to the various warships. The captured ship is then sold, and its contents gutted. In some cases, pirate Large has converted warships he has captured into pirate ships, themselves, to add extra embarrassment to their previous owners. He is not beyond gloating, a lot (see below). It does not always go well, with some players creating honey pot ships that contain hundreds of troops, but look and behave like merchants, just to tempt a pirate attack, and the fact pirates like operating in rings 10-12 often means that large numbers of warships patrol the same areas, and nothing spoils a pirates day more than bumping into a large fleet of trigger happy warships, especially ones with tractor beams that can slow the pirate down, thus preventing escape.

Large is currently the most aggressive pirate, but there have been others in the past, including an entire pirate affiliation (the RIP - think, well pirates, perhaps pirates turning a new leaf as dodgy criminals), and more stories than you could recount, including one where the head of the Imperial affiliation (think Star Wars Imperials) Stellar Patrol (which is the name for their war fleet, you have to wear jackboots to 'name' your warfleet anything other than 'warfleet' or 'battle squadron'...) joined an anti-piracy player task force, whilst neglecting to mention to the eager participants that he was actually controlling the pirate they were all hunting. He then used the information provided, to ensure none of his pirate ships were captured. He was rumbled in the end, though, and heads did roll. More recently, the GCE (more human traders, though these guys are more franchise operators - so perhaps MacDonalds in space) have been targeted by some mercenaries, in a similar manner to the Johnny Alpha situation. Even though they attempted to resist, they were forced to pull out of several bases, as their anonymous attackers proved too much. Most players still do not know the originator of that action, or the people who might be pay-rolling that particular set of events.

Pirates are generally hated, but they also provide a lot of excitement in-game, and it is, perhaps, one of the most challenging things to do. Personally, I hope they long continue, as they provide a lot of spice to the trading side of the game.

Notes

You often see messages such as these on the Nexus (the most common way to disseminate news):

"Garcia Enterprises deeply regrets to report the loss of GCE SHIP Pink Panther (43438), which was taken by PIR The Kings Palace (69572) at Acropolis (162) - {Beta,10}. Our deepest condolences go out to the families and friends of our lost crew. Any assistance in the capture or destruction of the pirates and recovery of the ship and its contents would be most welcome. "

And

"It is with deep regret that I must announce yet MORE deaths. This time to Piratical SCUM who boarded and took my ship. I only received the auto-notification from the ship's computer which stated that the three crew members were brutally overpowered and slaughtered like dogs. I can only imagine that they put up one HELL of a fight though.

A memorial service will be held in their honour.

They will be remembered. The ship was taken in the outer sectors of the Discordia System where it was forced to wait when the safety cut-outs kicked in. The Pirates responsible will be marked and - if encountered again - will be made to pay. The scum, for what it is worth were on board - PIR SHIP Sodden Wart (4259)

If you will forgive me, I have some calls to make to the families of the lost crew."

More rarely do the pirates fail in actual boarding, but they do, on odd occasions.

"The following pirate PIR SHIP Putrid Mind (66933) attempted to board one of our peaceful traders today with 222 human marines, 35 veteran human marines, 136 warbot Mark IV's and 270 aquahoid marines (who were like a fish out of water hohohho)

Our trader defended itself valiantly and easily resisted the hostile incursion. Dewiek casualties were low with 36 Dewiek dead and the boarders being defeated.

Pirate casualties can only be estimated at around 38 personnel and 12 warbots.

May I raise a howl to the valiant defenders whose bravery defeated this force. Our dead feast in Valhalla and our living will be feasting on the pirate dead. Plus any vegetarians have the added bonus of some fish to eat.

Glory to the Dewiek!"

Large, though, posts in his own (very pirate-like) indomitable style, and does so love to rub it in.

"ahharrggghhh me hearties.....

It be aye.....

Pirate Large.....

Now it be a while since i posted on this ere board aye it be.....

But busy i be.....

10 ships be taken o varyin types, some DEN, some KAS, some GCE, some AFT an some warships aye.....

Me best takes be the KAS 200 hulled warship soon to be plyin its trade in the lanes.....

Me boys did get a few beatins aye tryin to get a ship or 2, an IMP ship gave me a bloody nose, anuvver DEN an HEX ship an all.....

some be lucky as well, some be over powered aye they be but not enough time fer thee.....

We also lost, aye we did, me small boardin ship Errata Gel Pi, she tooks a few ships in her time, an shagged em like the best out thar, we raise a glass o rum to those that fell behind aye we do.....garrrr.....

Now this ere DEN fella i captured, well he be impressed wiv the size o me tool, he goes roun in circles aye he does an asks me is there a way i can helps him get a todger likes i as.

I said "as it happen i as, i have this ere tool a modern invention aye it be, that will make yee cock big enough to touch the floor....."

now he be gettin excited.....yee can tell on a dog as that little pink thing sticks out aye it does.....

he says "what will it cost me to has this ere operation....."

I says "cos yee puts up a fight ill do it fer free....."

He says,"ill have it....."

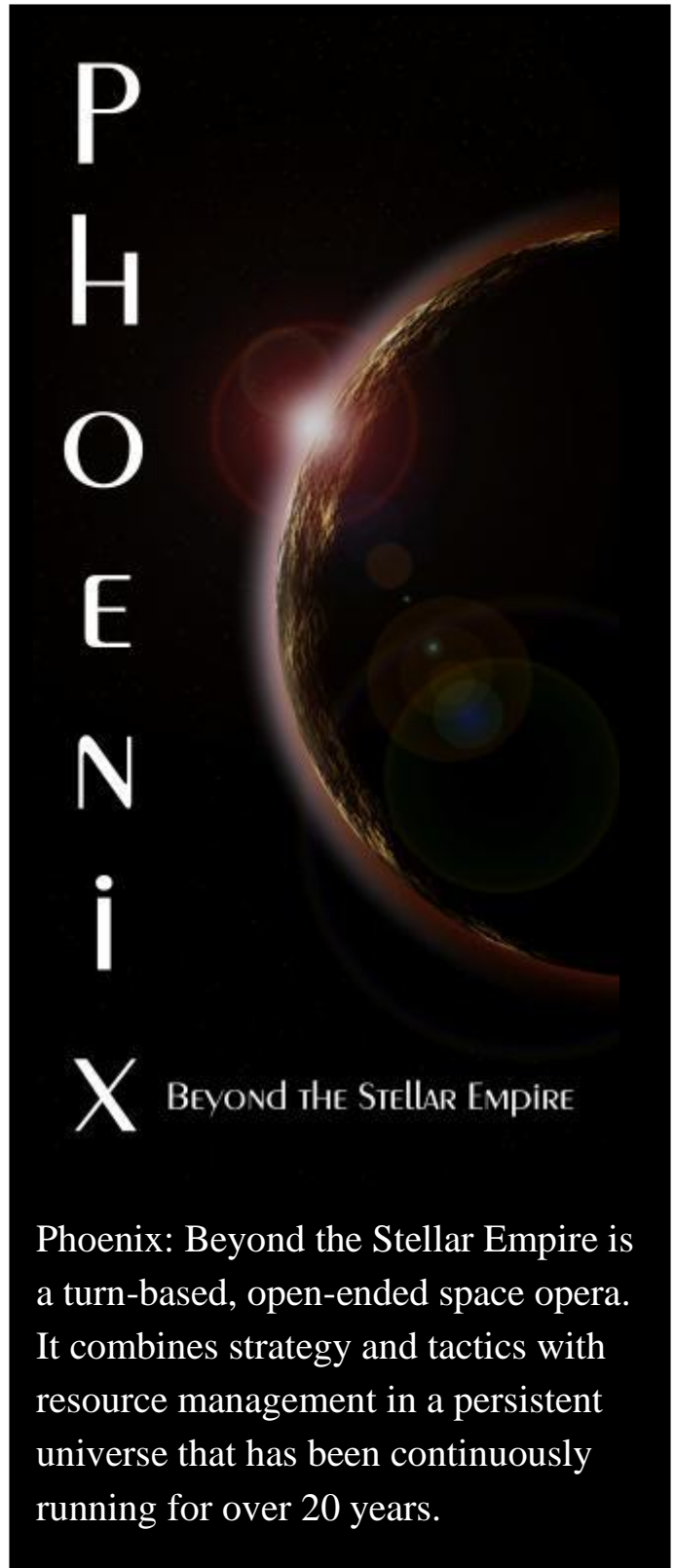
Well i takes out me sword an chops his legs off.....

Now he gets what he wished fer.....

aharrgghhhh.....

any ways im sure you will hear more from the Glorious Adventures of the

Pirate Large(and friends).....aahaaarrgh"



The cover art for 'Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire' features a dark, space-themed background. On the right side, a large, glowing, curved celestial body, possibly a planet or a nebula, is visible. The title 'PHOENIX' is written vertically in large, white, serif capital letters on the left side. Below the title, the subtitle 'BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE' is written in a smaller, white, serif font. At the bottom right, there is a paragraph of text describing the game.

PHOENIX
BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire is a turn-based, open-ended space opera. It combines strategy and tactics with resource management in a persistent universe that has been continuously running for over 20 years.

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REGIME

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ACEMA

Tangled Up

Stuck in a PBM Web of Our Own Creation

Charles Mosteller

**Oh what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive!
- Sir Walter Scott**

We live in a Digital Age, and we have become an Information Based Society. Yet, we still love to play by mail.

Or by e-mail. Or via the Internet. Or via the World Wide Web, or Web, for short.

The Harlequin Games website touts itself as the Home of Turn-Based Internet Gaming. Madhouse Interactive Entertainment's website proclaims itself to be the world's leading turn-based games company.

These are but a couple of examples of PBM companies reinventing or re-branding themselves for a modern audience of gamers.

Previously, Madhouse characterized itself as, and I quote, "A worldwide organization that designs and runs Play-By-Mail games all over the world and is one of the few PBM companies with offices in more than one country."

Didn't Madhouse previously bill itself as offering "the best in play-by-mail gaming entertainment?" Whatever became of Madhouse's much ballyhooed *Darker Side*™ of Play-By-Mail (PBM) Gaming?

So, it seems that the darker side was traded in for the title of world's leading, and Play-By-Mail games morphed into turn-based games. Uh, OK. But, weren't they already

turn-based games, back when they were just PBM games?

What's going on here, fellas?

Far from any sleight of hand, the simple reality of the situation is that companies such as Madhouse and Harlequin have simply tried to stay relevant. They have merely sought to ensure that their characterization of their various games remains relevant to gamers of the modern era.

Once upon a time ago, the mail was delivered here in the United States by the Pony Express (among other methods). Over the years, mail has been transported by a variety of different methods - by rail, by steamship, by automobile, and even by foot.

These days, an awful lot of mail is transported electronically. It's called e-mail, and it has numerous digital cousins. Which is why Harlequin Games is now the home of turn-based gaming, and why Madhouse is currently a turn-based games company.

The core essence of what they and various other companies very similar to them offer to the public remains essentially the same - namely, good old PBM games. You just get your turn results a different way, that's all.

KJC Games offers turn results via a Nexus. Enlightened Age Entertainment's episodic gaming fare, namely its Alamaze flagship product, utilizes the Internet, also. Flying Buffalo is in on the turn results via electronic means bandwagon, also.

Reality Simulations is still sending out turn results for Hyborian War the old fashioned way, though, via the postal service.

But, if you want to download kingdom set-up reports for that game, you can grab as many as you need by downloading them electronically, albeit from GrimFinger.Net, rather than directly from RSI's own website. Those electronic downloads via the Internet were made possible by Lee Kline at RSI mailing me paper copies of all kingdom set-up reports, so that I could scan them and post them online for one and all to obtain at your convenience.

So, in its own way, RSI is on the same bandwagon as the rest of these fellows, just in its own way.

There are other PBM companies out there, of course. Between the PlayByMail.Net website and the PBM Wiki site, it's pretty easy to find a link to most all of the ones that I am aware of, if you're interested in seeing what all is on the current PBM menu.

Now, back to the tangled web that was mentioned in the opening sentence of this article.

In my considered opinion, PBM gaming is currently tangled in a web. Or, more precisely, it is tangled in **THE** Web. The World Wide Web, or as it tend to be more commonly referred to, these days, the Internet.

Play-By-Mail is not tangled, because of attempts by companies to reinvent or to re-brand themselves or their gaming wares. Rather, PBM is tangled, because not nearly as much effort has been expended on the website end of things, as has been expended on the gaming end of things. And because this is the case, I think that this error in

overall approach has caused our favored form of turn-based gaming to become stuck, to a large degree.

Of late, rather than focus all of my available time and energy on this magazine, I have been gallivanting about all over the Internet, looking at websites and exploring things such as page ranks, analytics, and search engine optimization (or SEO, for short).

In the process, the experience has helped me to learn more about my own websites' deficiencies, as well as some of the PBM industry's deficiencies, as a whole.

By and large, the PBM industry has done a terrific job of creating games that are interesting, that have much depth, and score highly for replayability.

That said, where the PBM industry really sucks is in two primary areas - its websites and its advertising. That's the layman's version, however. If you want the whole enchilada, then the core deficiencies of the PBM industry are in the areas of online presence and marketing.

Again, that's my opinion. You don't have to agree with it. You don't have to share it. But, then again, you're not the one writing this article.

In many instances, you have a situation where you have PBM companies that want new players, but at the same time, visitor traffic to their websites is virtually nil. Either that, or it's the wrong kind of traffic. Spambots, anybody??

Online presence and marketing are not the PBM industry's only shortcomings, though, but they are the biggest. In order to fix them, you also have to address two other problems - lack of investment and

moderator disengagement.

The cheapest - though not necessarily the easiest - of these four problems to fix is the last of the bunch. In order to fix the problem of moderator disengagement, it requires that PBM companies and game moderators actually care enough to fix what ails the PBM industry. If they don't care, then the problem doesn't get fixed. Not now, not ever. It's that simple.

The investment problem is a bit more complicated. There are three things that are needed, in order to remedy this problem. The three things that need to be invested are time, money, and expertise.

Tossing money at the problem won't fix it. It's not as though no one has ever spent any money on trying to promote their company or their games. In fact, many thousands of dollars have been spent, down through the years. What does the PBM industry have to show for it?

Granted, it has something, but that's not the point. Rather, the question to ask yourself is, does the PBM industry, having spent that money, now have what it wants?

Hardly.

I say that, because the player base for many PBM games has shrunk to pretty low numbers. Or, am I wrong about that?

My own approach to building PBM related websites and to publishing a PBM magazine for the 21st Century has largely followed this formula: I have more time than I have expertise, and I have more expertise than I have money. Consequently, money is not the driving force in my approach to solving the problem.

Furthermore, none of us are promised

tomorrow, plus I have grown older with the passage of time, so I never really know how much - if any - time that I have left to devote to trying to solve the problem. Even still, I choose to persist.

With regard to expertise, I tend to acquire what relatively little expertise that I have through trial and error, by investing time and trying to recoup at least part of that investment by walking away with something in exchange, be it a new skill or talent or sub-set of knowledge - even if it is something fairly small, in and of itself standing alone. Cumulatively, those little tidbits begin to add up, after a while.

Not enough to make me an expert on any of it, mind you, but enough to convey a portion of expertise upon me, just the same.

Instead of just working harder, maybe what the PBM industry needs to do is to work smarter.

The PBM Industry is fighting today's war for players with the weapons of yesteryear. It is a recipe for failure.

The PBM industry's websites are, to a very large degree, relics and dinosaurs from earlier days of the Internet. They have a very dated look and feel to them. They are in dire need of replacement.

This isn't news, of course. Yet, it remains the current reality, nonetheless.

There's a saying that goes something like this: If it's not broke, then don't fix it.

But, that's just it - it is broke. The PBM industry's approach to websites and advertising, to online presence and marketing, to investment and engagement, is broken. None of these problems will fix themselves. They require intervention.

They require action. They demand a concerted effort.

Yet, what is the PBM industry actually doing to address its shortcomings?

Technology is a catalyst for change. The PBM industry, by comparison, strikes me as being largely averse to change. It's set in its ways. It reaps its reward, accordingly.

Realistically, the chances of the PBM industry as a collective whole waking up and changing its entrenched approach to doing things is probably virtually nil. Thus, change of consequence and note in a positive direction, where these problem areas are concerned, if it is to occur at all, will most likely occur on an individual basis.

If it is true that there are no players, then what is the likely return on investment for PBM companies and game moderators to invest in the fundamentals required to put the PBM industry on more solid footing?

But, how is it that in a world whose population just keeps on getting bigger, rather than smaller, that there are no players? Gaming is a multi-billion dollar industry, with many millions of gamers playing games of every sort imaginable.

With a pitiful approach towards advertising, while simultaneously putting its face to the world in the form of obsolete and ineffective websites, realistically speaking, what kind of results should the PBM industry actually expect?

The PBM industry suffers from complacency. It seemingly remains content with the status quo. Perhaps a better way of putting it, though, would be to describe the PBM Industry as having resigned itself to what it perceives to be its fate. The reason that

Play-By-Mail gaming endures a lingering nightmare to its player base is because the PBM industry refuses to wake itself up out of its self-induced slumber.

As long as the PBM industry sits on its collective ass, then it won't accomplish much of anything.

This magazine has no vested interest in preserving the status quo. The very act of this magazine coming into existence was a disruption of the status quo.

Sure, we criticize, but we also advocate.

The very fact that you are reading this article, right now, is due to the status quo being discarded and overcome. Change was necessary, in order for there to be a PBM magazine in existence, once again.

This magazine does not publish itself. Articles in it do not write themselves. Positive change to the PBM industry will not happen by itself.

There must be change. There must exist catalysts of change. There simply must be, or one of two things will likely happen.

Either the status quo for the PBM industry will remain intact, with all of the attendant baggage that such entails, or the PBM industry will continue to deteriorate, slowly but surely.

To rebuild its player base, the PBM industry must be prepared to fight for new players. It must be prepared to advertise for them. It must be prepared to revamp itself, to rebrand itself, to reinvent itself.

In more ways than just one. In more ways than through mere words, alone. All of entertainment is at war with PBM. They want your players. What do you want?

What did they say about Issue #4?

"We did get
a potential
new player
mentioning
S&D

as the source
of finding us
– thanks!

"Great
magazine,
glad someone
is paying
attention
to the
industry."

"The issue is huge."



"I am very
interested
in the PBM
games, and
have really
had fun
reading
Suspense
&
Decision.
Thanks for
doing that
zine!"

"And the energy is contagious."

"Congratulations on the ambitious Issue #4."

"Are you kidding me, over 100 pages?"

"This zine is really enticing to
getting started in a PBM game."

"I like this magazine as well. Great reading!"

If Buffalo Could Fly

Is there anything that Rick Loomis doesn't know?

Charles Mosteller

Rick Loomis of [Flying Buffalo](#) fame recently offered me some advice and suggestions. One thing that he said was, and I quote, "Just make everything interesting."

Even I must admit that Rick Loomis is right. Where publishing this magazine is concerned, I just need to make everything interesting. The rest will take care of itself.

Now, how I am supposed to actually do that, Rick Loomis didn't say. Apparently, I've got to figure that one out on my own.

It would be quite a feat, quite an accomplishment, if I could pull that one off. To make everything interesting in a single issue of Suspense & Decision magazine for a single reader would be quite a hat trick, in my book. But, to make everything interesting for everyone, and in every issue, now that's quite a challenge.

Is that even possible, though?

Nonetheless, it's good advice. It's sound advice. It's wisdom, incarnate.

But, what it is not is self-executing. It is advice that looks good on paper, but when you try to put it into practice, it turns out to be a quite a significant challenge.

From time to time, I receive feedback from a variety of different PBM personalities. Whether it takes the form of praise or criticism, or merely the form of suggestions or advice, it is good to receive such feedback. I dare say, I could use even more. In a venture like this, one cannot receive too

much feedback.

Rick Loomis also feels that I have a tendency to get way too wordy, and that it's hard to read one of my entire articles. He's probably right about that, too, although Ixnay did say that he's "hungrily read every article in the prior 3 issues." Maybe he didn't mean mine.

That he hungrily read it does not mean that he necessarily liked it all, equally, though. So, what's a fellow supposed to do, I ask you?

Rick Loomis wants me to do a better job on the author bylines for articles. For some reason, he seems to want to know who actually wrote the darned things. And, to make matters worse, I'm running into great difficulty coming up with a good explanation for telling you, our readers, why Rick Loomis is wrong on this particular point. So, I'm going to go ahead and concede that Rick Loomis is right. The magazine needs to do a better job with its article bylines.

Rick Loomis sure knows a lot about what makes a magazine good and interesting to read. Which leaves me wondering why, then, he runs PBM games, instead of publishing a PBM magazine of his own? Of course, there is that [Flying Buffalo Quarterly](#). But, does that even count?

I would tell you some more things that Rick Loomis might be right about, but Rick Loomis prefers that I say more by saying less. He wants shorter articles by me, so by God, let's give him one. Happy reading, Rick!

To Boldly Go

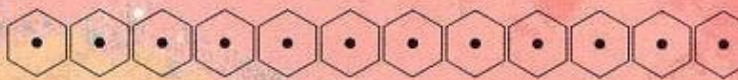


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Strategic Campaign in the High Arena

WARLORD

New Die Hard Game Starting!!

A new Die Hard Game starting on April 19th, 2014.

If you are interested in joining , please send an Initial Build to warlord@play-by-e-mail.com, or log into your account and use the Initial Build page for game D35 will be needed by April 19th, 2014.

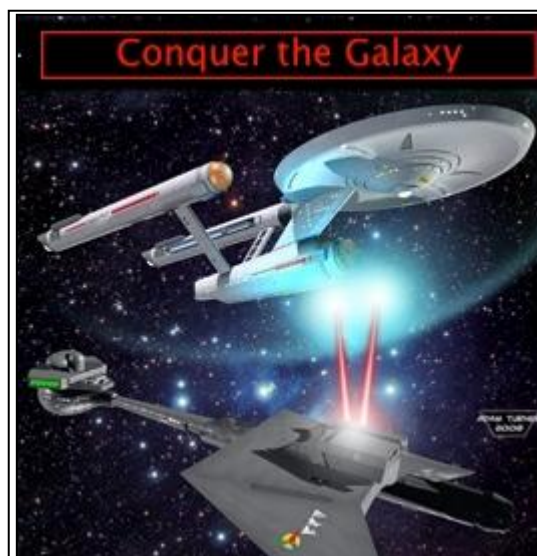
Also, you can fax the initial build at **484-334-7634**.

In addition to the usual Die Hard rules, the game will be using:

1. EV order will be available.
2. Starting year is Y165.
3. Select you Home Office Sector Special
4. No Primary Races.
5. Random Corporation Numbers

Prizes:

- \$50 - First Place
- \$25 - Second Place
- \$10 - Third Place



Paul Franz

warlord@play-by-e-mail.com

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Do Graphics Have a Place in PBM?

Amber

Once upon a time, in an office far far away, there were banks of printers churning out turn reports, with hoards of office staff stuffing envelopes full of papers and licking stamps. I can understand why, when it first started, play by mail had no graphics to speak of, as every turn had to be printed off. Apart from the limitations of the actual printers, can you imagine the cost of colour printers and ink! Things have moved on, now, and I would think that most games now have an email option, or at the very least, have a web page to advertise their game and to try to entice people to try it. So, should PBM stick to its roots and be minimalistic, or should it branch out and embrace the image-rich Internet culture?

My first thought was that, obviously, I am pro-graphics, as that is what I spend most of my time doing. If you look at the front of the [Phoenix:BSE](#) website, there are lots of images sprinkled throughout the text. The images breakup the block wall of text, draw the eye to the title, add diversity to the different pages (so they do not all look the same), and hopefully, some of them even look quite nice. Having a new image for the weekly Subspace Static newsletter shows when the next SSS has been posted, and keeps the front page active, so that casual visitors to the site can see it had changed every week and is an active game. The SSS images are also posted on Facebook, to indicate that a new newsletter is up and ready to read. Facebook is one medium where images work much better than words, when you are scrolling down you know when

you see a space scene or fractal (I admit to being very partial to my fractals), then you straight away associate it with a new SSS being published. I have the same association for Suspense & Decision, when I am scrolling down and see what has become the characteristic back and white illustration, I stop and read more on it. I also do a monthly calendar with bank holidays, and double run days marked on it, to hopefully remind people when they are going to occur, and if players are feeling frivolous with their stellars, they can always commission a medal to show under their character on the forum, or to give to other characters to commemorate a special event.

When we started updating the Phoenix:BSE website, we came across several issues, when it came to images.

1. Copyright Images.

Lots of images available on the Internet are free to use for personal or non-profit organisations, but when it comes down to business use, there are not many, at all. That Battlestar Gallactica ship might be really nice, but I think people are going to notice that you have nicked it straight from the poster.

2. Players' Imagination.

One thing about players who have a long-standing tradition of roleplaying is that they all have very good imaginations, and if you have been playing an affiliation for 20 years, you know in your head what your ships look like, and there is no way that any artist is

going to be able to capture it. Even if you got around that issue by putting in some token "EEM" ships, there is the representation of all the different alien affiliations to be considered. I doubt the DEN would like to be represented as a fluffy poodle, or the Flagritz as an upside down pear. Although there is the case of the Wimbles (who have to be similar to Wombles) and the DTR, well, I think the depiction of someone drinking tea and biscuits is one of those universal images that everyone can share.

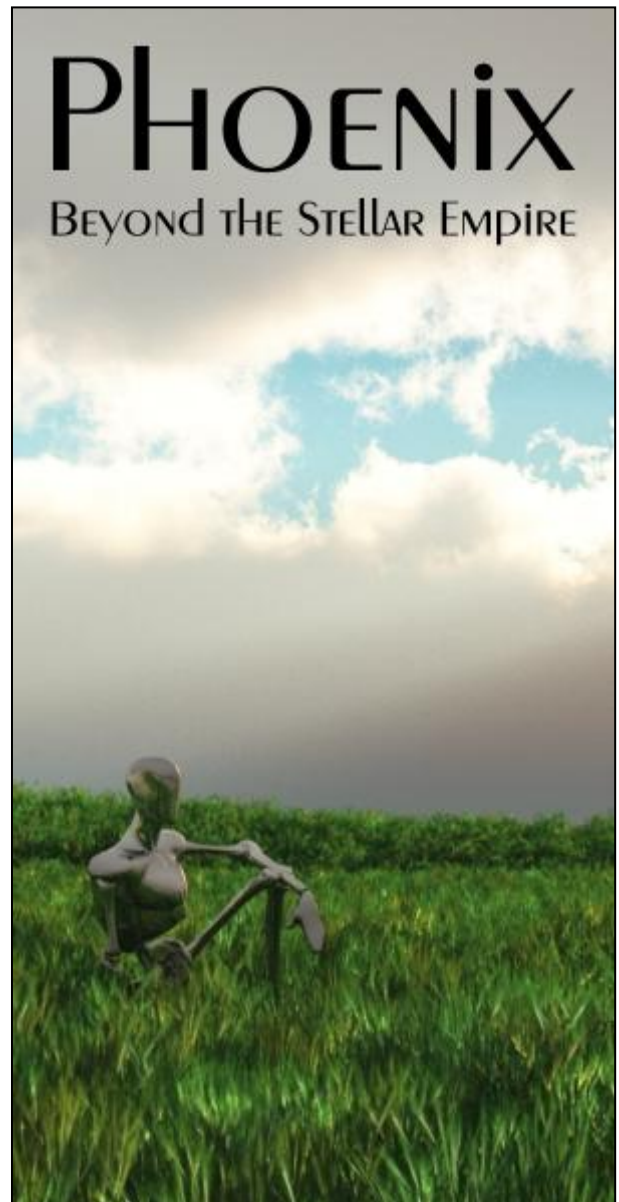
3. Artists are really really expensive.

To have an artist on staff to do all the work we wanted, we would have to not only pay them a decent wage, but also provide them with a suitable computer and the necessary software - and that proved to be prohibitively expensive. Even paying for the odd commission work was too much for our budget at the time, so we had to compromise and get someone to do it on the cheap, namely me, and by cheap, I mean for free, at least to start with. Over the years, I have developed and expanded my use of various programmes to create the images we use today. My favourite programme is Apophysis, a freeware fractal flame editor that I spend far too much time tinkering around on.

However, when you actually join the game and use the forum, there are lots of features incorporated into it to make it as minimalistic as possible, if you want it to be. There is a standard blue forum template used by many of the popular forums out there, so that the Phoenix:BSE forum does not stand out as a game, it is intentional that it looks like a plain forum. There are options to hide user images, medals, pips, even the header. This makes it easier, if you are on your mobile, if

you have a slow internet connection, or simply if you want to have a quick look at the forum at work without arousing the suspicions of your boss.

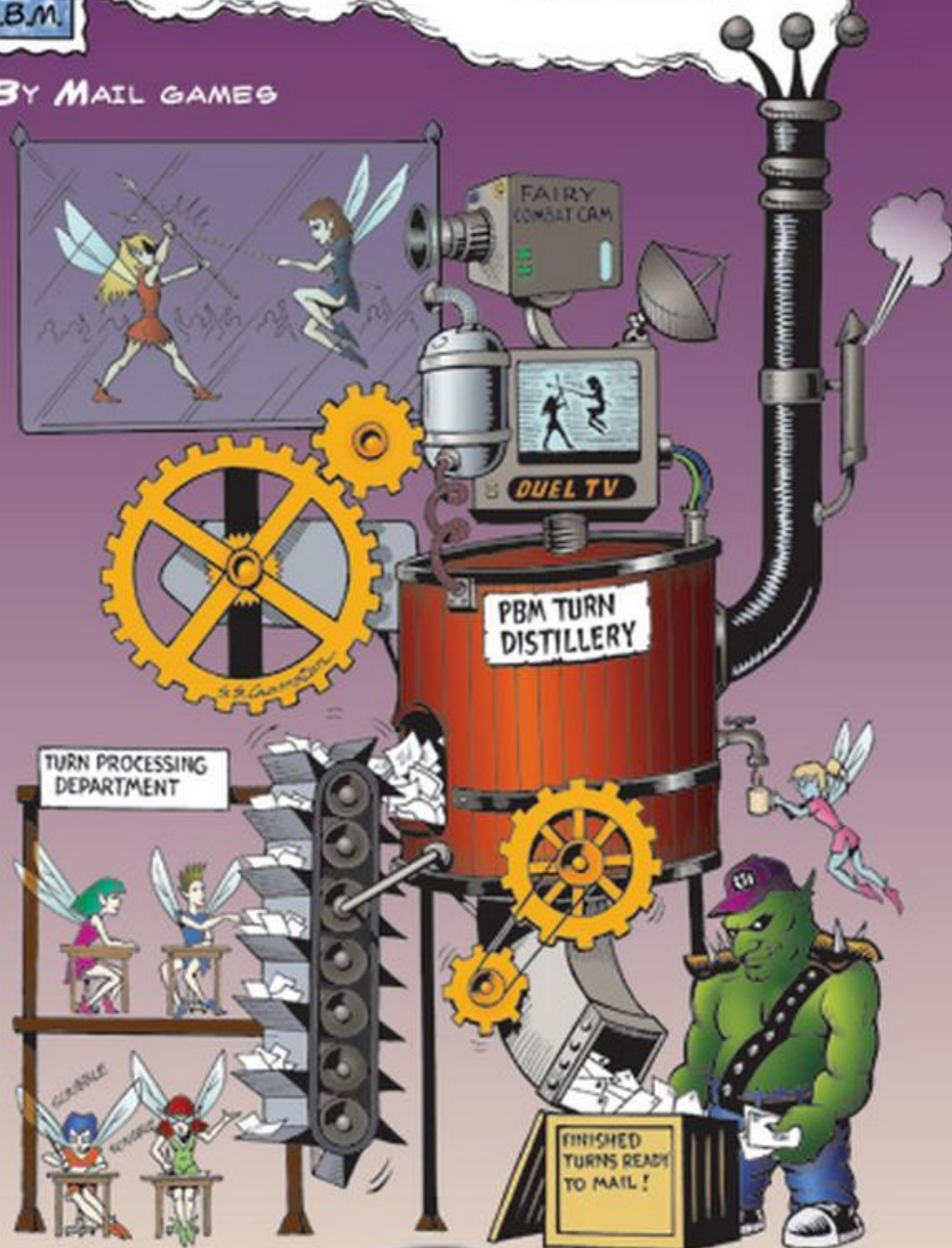
In conclusion, I would have to say if you want to get new players to stop and read your website and ultimately play the game, then you have to have something that is appealing to look at, something that looks as if you care about it, but when you have them hooked, you have to get the information over to them how they want to see it, which is usually as clutter-free as possible.





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PBM Activity Corner

News, Developments, & Bragging Rights

From Game Companies and Game Moderators

Flying Buffalo, Inc.

Next year's [Flying Buffalo convention](#) will be July 18-20 2014. We haven't played Starweb at our convention in years, but I have some folks talking about possibly coming to play Starweb this year. Please give it serious consideration. I have to get ten rooms reserved at the Holiday Inn to avoid paying \$300 a day for the meeting room. It will be at the Holiday Inn. Check our webpage, www.flyingbuffalo.com for details. SAVE THOSE DATES.

I've got a fellow who has been waiting a year for a SLOW Starweb game, but we only have 5 players waiting. How about signing up? It's just like a regular game, but you get a month between turns to plan.

Note that any "Multi" game of Starweb only needs 5 players, so if the waiting list has 3 or 4 players, it is about ready to start. Multi means you play 3 different positions instead of just one. You get three character types, and they are all combined into one position. Quite a challenge. (You get one combined printout, and all three positions start out allied and "seeing" each other. But you have to pick three different character types - you can't have three merchants!) The current waiting list is at:

www.flyingbuffalo.com/waiting.htm

- Rick Loomis -

Agema

+++ We interrupt your program to bring you the following breaking news. The government of the Republic is under threat from dissident elements of the banned terrorist network formerly known as the Majoritists. Latest reports suggest rebels have blown up the central barracks and are attempting to storm the House of Representatives. Elements of the Republican Guard are fighting back bravely and... +++

+++ Rebels are right now in the process of taking over the central government. Data libraries and communication devices have become non-functional. The frequent sound of gunfire and explosions around the city prove the situation is both violent and serious. +++

Work on AGEMA's new science-fiction PBM/PBEM is advancing well. For anyone interested, if you send us an email to agema@hotmail.co.uk and express an interest we'll send you an introductory MP3 audio file setting the scene for the game for free!

You can also check out latest progress on REGIME CHANGE on the web at: www.agema.org.uk

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Subject Heading: PBM ACTIVITY CORNER

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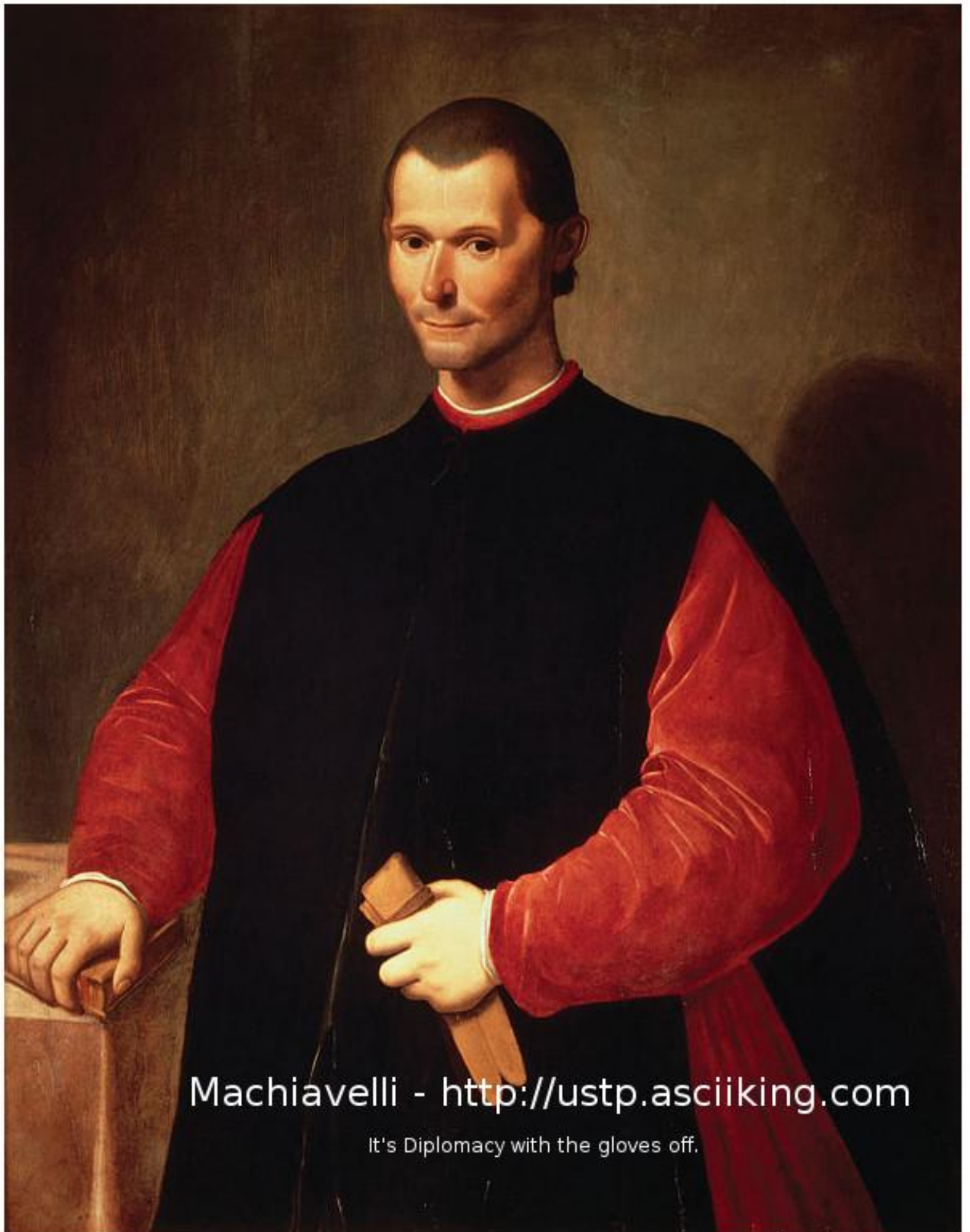
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Towns in UO

Silverleaf and Stonekeep

Jim Kemeny

I have not been able to find any Guilds on UO Europa. See [this thread](#). It is clear that for players in the game, it is still possible to join guilds, but they have gone informal, without advertising. New players seem to need to make contact informally, without using the forums or the Guild system.

I am going to describe the town guilds I used to know that were active, when I played on UO. Most town guilds are based on a number of player-built houses close by one another.

Silverleaf: A guild and village, mainly of elves on the north coast of Yew. [Silverleaf](#) was just as old, but the village was a smaller and more dispersed settlement, befitting a predominantly elven society, living in a world dominated by humans and preferring to keep a low profile to avoid hostility, especially from the Guardsmen Militia which was antagonistic to elves and whose town was a the Crossroads of Yew, a bit inland from Empath Abbey. This has always been exactly right for the Militia. The Guardsmen Militia attracted the players who enjoyed combat. It also had a deep mistrust of elves, who were not allowed to join. Smaed Fretting ended up in the Militia, only to much later learn of his half-elf origins as a natural son of a Silverleaf elven character that he much later discovered he was. Jern also moved there. His stealth skill fitted well. Silverleaf was a guild town run by German players, Marc playing Smaed's father.

Extract from the start of Jern's Journal

Brief background summary

[At the age of 10, Aunt Angst¹ took me and](#)

¹ Agnes Fretting, had *The Sight*, the ability to see the future, which was the reason for her angst. She left her

[my cousin Smaed to safety in Trinsic, to escape the peril that *The Sight* warned her loomed over Leafsta. Her plan was for us to live with and take care of a distant elderly mining relative, "Digs" Delver - lone surviving descendent of one of the boat-people families - who had a croft in the western foretown². Escorted by a strange bandana-wearing ranger,³ we arrived safely, and settled into what would, hopefully, be for both Smaed and for me at least a stay of only a year or so.](#)

[But four years passed, constantly scanning the skies for pigeons, but without any word from my father or any other Leafstans. Digs died when I was 14, leaving his croft and all his chattels to Angst. I decided to return to Leafsta and find out what was happening. Smaed wanted to come, but he was too young for such a journey with only me, a callow youth, for protection. I made the long journey north, alone and on foot, and found the village destroyed and no sign of my kin. But, I also discovered the existence of the \[Guardsmen Militia\]\(#\), hitherto unsuspected by Leafstans by all accounts, for otherwise the fate of Leafsta might have been spared by the vigilance of these stalwart and earthy soldiers. I retraced my steps on the long road south, back to Trinsic, to consider my future."](#)

Smaed's decision

[I hovered for some time, but it was Smaed who precipitated my decision. He had been](#)

[wards in Trinsic and went away. This becomes a story in itself later.](#)

² the Duchy of Trinsic. A major sandstone town in the south, walled, much like the old Central European City states. This will be one of the subjects of next month's Part 2 to this post.

³ often worn by elves, who were excellent rangers, to hide their pointed ears

much upset by the news I brought back from Leafsta, and suffered even more than I did from the home-longing for the yew trees of the Norse Forest. The news I brought from Leafsta first made him go very quiet and withdrawn, but as he has a somewhat choleric humour, it increasingly made him restless, as the need grew for an outlet for his growing anger and feeling of helplessness.

It should, therefore, not have come as a surprise when one morning he announced he would return to the Norse Forest, and apply to join the Yew Militia.

Long did Aunt Angst and I try to dissuade him. But, he had made up his mind, and argued that he must find out what happened to Leafsta, and leave no stone unturned, to learn if any of our kin were still alive or if there was word of them. He also wanted to learn soldiering, and prepare for the day when he may take revenge on those who destroyed Leafsta. And in the militia, he could help defend the village communities and isolated settlements of the Norse Forest - Underhill, Yewdale, Kallahar, Silverleaf and many others - from the fate that befell our own village community of Leafsta.¹

I just found [this old thread on UO Stratics](#). Right at the start of my writing in October 2003, and extending for 2 years to 2005. It seems like those who read it (most have long since left UO) enjoyed it. It appeared, first, in [White Stag Inn on stratics](#). Its worth looking at the 9 pages of player input here, too, to get some of the flavour of what we were trying to do. The very first thread is

¹ In those days there were many player-created settlements in Yew, apart from Stonekeep and Silverleaf. *Kallahar* was a Celtic community, *Underhill* was Tolkienesque, small but concentrating on simplicity, concealment and light-fingered skills. There was also an orc guild, with its own dialect/language. And many others I can't remember the details of. The largest player guild town was *Valoria* which until very recently still had its website, sadly now gone.

about in-game player libraries: [Player Written Book Libraries](#).

Many of the best players and writers were women, though it's hard to be sure, as I mostly knew them by their characters' names. This was, for example, true of the founder of the Serfs guild, that Jern joined. Her character's name was *Sally Buttons*, though I have no idea what her real name was. She hired a part of *Ye Olde Post Office* to sell her seamstress wares. The player sadly passed away some months ago, and will be much missed.

The Guardsmen Militia: This was a player-invented guild with its own town called *Stonekeep*, located near the *Crossroads of Yew*. It claimed to be the oldest of the large guilds on Europa Shard.

The old website of the Guardsmen Militia was last updated seven years ago in 2007. It had a hard core of dedicated players, many of whose names even today I recognize (see [contacts](#)). This is the website I was familiar with in the early days of my participation in Ultima Online. The Guild website is well-worth a visit. It used to be accompanied by the solo playing of a fife, which gave it added atmosphere suitable to the rough and ready individualists of the militia. The idea was a wonderful sub-creation. Stonekeep was a settlement, a small town, no less, near the crossroads of Yew, with barracks, a fortress, and with its own austere church. There was also the *King's Deer Tavern*, where the soldiers could drink and relax with their fellows. The page on [recruitment](#) is especially interesting, as it is intended for new players. Creating a Guardsman gives advice for the choice of name, as the character has to be newly-created to be considered as a Recruit, the potential to take the king's shilling, and to become a *Trainee*, the bottom rung of the ladder of promotions, and then work one's way up.

["Try to come up with an interesting and creative personality and a background for](#)

your character, but don't overdo the background.

Come up with a name of your own that sounds Britannian, like for example, Boris, Wrenthal, or Robert. Stolen names are not allowed (e.g. Rand Al'Thor, Gandalf or Mondain) and the name must have a capital letter ("boris" is not allowed, however "Boris" is fine). Also, try to avoid picking a name that is already in use in the Militia, by having a look at the [Roster](#)."

"All guardsmen in the Militia are unique characters (just as their creators), but to make the roleplaying more enjoyable, they should have visible traits. You must decide upon how your character speaks, acts and create a personality for him or her. And foremostly, you must make it visible, so that others notice, and understand what kind of role you are playing"

"Note, that because of the (evil) role of Elves in the religion of the Guardsmen, your guard cannot be of the Elven race. Derivations of the Elven race (half elves, dark elves) are also forbidden. Basically all races other than Human are mistrusted, and might end up in lethal danger merely based on their appearance, so choose wisely. A creature half-cat, half-man would surely be shunned by the majority of guardsmen and hunted down by the Church. Dwarves have been accepted, but only with permission from an Officer.

Check the section [Character Traits](#) to get some funny ideas on how to roleplay your character. Create at least five personal emotes¹ for your guardsman, which he often

¹ *personal emotes* are actions by the character. There are a number of neat conventions role-players have developed to widen the character repertoire of actions, most useful in depicting demeanor is to asterisk the words: a more developed form of using smileys: from simple ones like *coughs* or *winks*, to more developed

spends his time with. Try to make them as unique, fitting, and fun as possible."

The Guardsman Militia had other special forces, including Marksmen, Beseigers (heavy infantry), Wayfinders (scouts), Templi (priests to cleanse evil and to summon gates, as well as act as Confessor to an allotted soldier). There was also a Townfolk category, for crafters. And a fleet to trade and deter piracy.

My experience as a player in the Guardsman Militia: When Smaed decided to go to Stonekeep and take [the king's shilling](#), he was doing so to find out what happened to Leafsta. From my perspective as a player, I was more interested to experience the Militia as a roleplaying low-fantasy guild, with a wide variety of roles to choose between. Even before my reactions slowed, I found it difficult to "target" an enemy character in a melee, where so many others who were allies were closely packed around me, so I sometimes accidentally targeted a fellow Militia player. This caused aggro, naturally enough. But more than that, I just did not enjoy "hack and slay", or even just *entering* dungeons.

Smaed reached the rank of [Footman](#), before he realised he was half-elven and deserted. Deserting was not so easy. Before he knew he was half-elven, he was offered a place on a Militia ship bound for Trinsic. He took furlough, and once at Trinsic, found out about his half-elven parentage. By then, he was a *Footman*, the second rung on the

ones that describe a series of actions like making a horseshoe or shoeing a horse that could, at its most developed, become a small performance. It could even include quietly singing a song, *sub-voce*. A favorite of mine was [Scarborough Fair](#), another was a poem, [The Prisoner of Chillon](#), obviously not all of it but at least the first stanza, in the hope that someone would recognize it, as they often did. These can be saved and recalled when needed by key-strokes.

ladder after *Recruit*. I also liked the idea of a religion with its austere church. On his way back to Empath Abbey on foot, he stopped off at Stonekeep in the dead of night, and left all his gear in a pack, together with a letter explaining his actions.

Late April 2004 (written with help from Aunt Angst)

Smaed, Aunt Angst, and I had enjoyed a great time together: good food and drink, congenial company, and lots of warm sunshine, but now, it was over.

Smaed had seemed ill at ease and unsure of himself at the start of his visit, though he picked up noticeably, as time went by. It gradually emerged that he was finding life at Stonekeep tough. He had joined as a raw recruit, and his self-confidence had taken a severe knock. Most of the soldiers there were friendly enough, in fact, remarkably tolerant of his clumsiness and lack of skills, even cluelessness that clearly irritated some of the veterans. Sargeant Griffith and Smaed's Templi confessor had both been supportive (Smaed seems to have taken comfort in religion and had become regular in his devotions in Stonekeep Church), and some soldiers even went out of their way to mentor and help him, especially the Yreap siblings, Hans and Elizabeth, whom he spoke warmly of. He was clearly shaken by how hard he found it, but determined to stick to it.

To both my and Aunt Angst's growing wonder, Smaed kept delaying his departure. There was plenty of excuse to keep him occupied, helping out on the croft, and the weeks passed without any sign that he was leaving.

He did finally, but reluctantly, leave in late April - six weeks later than planned. The leave-taking had been harder than I had expected. I took farewell of my cousin, with emotions that took me by surprise by their strength. I was gripped by the home-longing for the Yew Forests, and longed to travel

north with my reluctant cousin. It felt supremely ironic that the one who wants to go has to stay behind, while the one who leaves wants nothing more than to stay! Aunt Agnes clearly didn't know how to respond to this, and later she told me that her heart went out to both her foster sons.

Having just waved cousin Smaed off on his way back to Stonekeep, and still fighting to keep back the tears, I sat slumped at the kitchen table opposite my aunt, deep in thought, exercised both by the irony of Smaed's situation and my own. I blinked away tears, trying to swallow the lump that seemed to be stuck in my throat. How I missed the Norse Forest! It felt like a stone lodged in my heart. Aunt Angst noticed, of course, but said nothing. I swallowed hard, and cleared my throat to make sure I was in sufficient command of my emotions to speak in a normal voice. "No good sitting here," I said gruffly. "I'd better get back to work". Aunt Angst said nothing, but looked at me with compassion. I quickly rose from the table and left, before letting the tears flow where there was nought but the browsing livestock to notice.

Once outside and busy mining, I shook off much of my melancholy. There is nothing better than hard work to alleviate the blues. But, I thought much about my reactions. I realised that I found living in Trinsic difficult. Smaed may have trouble adapting to soldiering, but I found the social graces of the big city just as trying. Smaed may well be militarily incompetent (not that I would know), but I was certainly socially incompetent. I realised that both of us had been torn away from our village of close kin and put into an alien environment. It would take time for both of us to adjust. I - and Smaed for that matter - must just get on with our lives, gradually learn and adjust, and be patient. But, I promised myself that one day I would make the long and dangerous journey back to my beloved yew forest, if only for a visit.



ALAMAZE

RESURGENT IN 2014!

Dragon Magazine

Issue #131

"Alamaze is a treat. Speaking as a game designer, it's one of the finest designs I've seen. I like it and recommend it to experienced gamers."

White Wolf Magazine

Issue #11

"Alamaze is possibly the finest play by mail game in existence. It is certainly the most innovative design since the first PBM game emerged... It should be tried by anyone who considers himself a real gamer."



Paper Mayhem Magazine

Issue #19

"Alamaze has all the strategy, intrigue, fear and paranoia that makes a great game. It's a great value."

Flagship Magazine

Issue #11

"Alamaze is one of the finest PBM games on the market, today. It is fast paced and exciting. It is full of all the action, intrigue and role-playing any player could ask for."

Paper Mayhem Magazine

Issue #28

"Among the many innovations in Alamaze is the truly fantastic magic system, unequalled anywhere in PBM. Not only does the magic system fit in with the entire game system hand-in-hand, it also shows the depth and massive amounts of designing and programming time spent lavishly in this game."

Alamaze is back with refreshed rules, our new Resurgent Map, new custom game formats, twice-weekly turns, a great value subscription at \$19.95 a month for about 7 turns – less than \$3 a turn. Our players have started more than 50 games in the last year and created more than 10,000 forum posts. Destiny beckons: Return to Alamaze!

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Non-Aggression In Alamaze

Word Fairy Magic or Propaganda by Any Other Name?

Charles Mosteller

Alamaze is a game that features many different aspects of game play. While playing that game, it is perfectly acceptable to carry out assassinations, annihilate whole armies, and conquer entire nations.

All the more curious, then, that the Alamaze community is trying to come to terms with the issue of non-aggression pacts made by players of that game.

NAPs are nothing new to PBM and turn-based gaming, of course. They even happen during play of board games, with Risk being one such game that springs immediately to mind.

The Alamaze discussion on this topic that I am referring to can be found [here](#), if you're interested in following along.

George Cameron's quote from 1994, the one in the box on this page, is well worth remembering.

How best to deal with non-aggression pacts? How to solve a problem of this nature, one that is player-crafted?

Personally, I find the NAP dilemma that the Alamaze player community is currently enduring to be more than a little amusing.

Over the years, many things pertaining to PBM games have changed. One thing that has not changed, however, is the blood thirsty nature of the play by mail player.

How much better the entire world might be, if only we lived in a Utopia populated by gentlemen and ladies.

Many games suffer from non-aggression pacts, not just PBM games. In spite of "evolving" past the use of the postal service to deliver turn results to players, Alamaze remains no less susceptible to NAPs.

Of course, if gentlemanly ways and honor amongst players is the end all and be all that some would have everyone believe, it

really begs the question of why those very same players are stooping to entering into non-aggression pacts to begin with?

I will say this about that discussion thread over on the Alamaze forum. It certainly is a sterling example of propaganda at its finest, an exercise in the clever art of word manipulation. Don't hesitate to grab your boots, if you join that discussion.

Where non-aggression pacts are concerned, Alamaze holds no monopoly upon the

"The god Krah! must not be a nice person, because he has put me in a blood thirsty game with seven others! I named my empire Bad Company and decided not to worry so much about my economics. I believe in the old ways, like with armies and navies. I contact the player to the north of me and make a non aggression pact with him, while grabbing the neutrals around my capital."

- George "Brutal" Cameron's opening words in his article, "Addicted to Krah!izek," that appeared in Paper Mayhem Issue # 67.

challenges that such player-initiated undertakings generate.

Do the game rules or the game moderator require players to enter into such agreements? Of course not. Rather, this is something that the players, themselves, take it upon themselves to do of their own free will and volition.

Why is it OK to enter into a non-aggression pact, to begin with, but not OK to end them, at will? Yet, the pot dares call the kettle black?

A non-aggression pact, at its core essence, is an exercise in treachery. Yet, some dare feign indignation and surprise, when these instruments of treachery are not rigorously adhered to. To be certain, more than a little irony inheres in the treacherous being betrayed by ilk of their own kind.

What is often left out of the discussion, by those who seek to unilaterally elevate non-aggression pacts to the place of personal honor, are the sacrificial lambs - the other players, the ones whose kingdoms are painted with target symbols, due to the fabricated convenience that NAPs afford those who craft them.

Non-aggression pacts are tools of convenience, to be certain. They are also instruments of war. It has long been said that all is fair in love and war. Many love Alamaze, to be certain, but at its core essence, it is a war game, is it not? Certainly, the home page of the Alamaze website asserts that it is. So, what's the problem, exactly?

When non-aggression pacts get entered into, make no mistake about it - somebody is getting sold up the river. It's just usually someone who is not a party to the NAP. To

enter into a non-aggression pact is an attempt to carve out an advantage of some type for one's own self. It is an artificial advantage, one fabricated out of the whole cloth of deviousness. It is with an agenda that one enters into a NAP.

Alamaze, like many turn-based games, is a game where time is a precious commodity. Thus, even if all that one is after, when entering into a non-aggression pact, is to buy time for themselves to consolidate their existing position, make no mistake about it - time, itself, can be a luxury. With time, one can do many things.

To be certain, NAPs can - and do - make games more interesting, at times. Alamaze is a contest of wits, on many levels. Non-aggression pacts evolve out of the challenge of wits.

But, is it possible for a player to betray a NAP in one game, yet adhere rigorously to it in another? Positively. How is such a thing possible, you ask? It's not hard, really. All that it requires is for a player to exercise personal choice in the matter.

After all, a person that enters into a NAP with you in one game of Alamaze may just as easily enter into a NAP against you in another game of Alamaze. It's OK to do that, but it's not OK to hold to a NAP in one game, and break a NAP in the next? Suddenly, at the point that it is broken, that particular player has no honor? Don't be ridiculous!

If you enter into a non-aggression pact, then inherent to that conscious choice and deliberate act, the risk of betrayal naturally attaches. NAPs are done behind other players' backs. How, then, do they suddenly hold company with honor? Oh, that's right! It's all about convenience. As quickly and as easily as one can enter into a non-

aggression pact to the disadvantage of the other players in the game, one can just as quickly and just as easily turn on a dime, and begin lecturing other players about how dishonorable that it is to break a NAP.

One of the Kingdom positions in Alamaze that players can play is the Seven Hells of the Demon Princes. That's very colorful phraseology. What is it that NAP propagandists believe? That their fellow players in the game will be angels, while they, themselves, craft their devious little non-aggression pacts to serve their own interests - at the expense of their fellow players' chances of winning the game?

Where is this very same penchant for "honor," when it comes to them creating and entering into non-aggression pacts in the first place?

Again, it is convenient to roll out the honor argument, after one party to a NAP breaks the NAP. All of a sudden, the honor lecture begins. While the melodrama makes for interesting reading, it hardly imbues the NAP culprit crying foul with more honor than any of their fellow players. Yet, if you can persuade others to buy into this hogwash, then you may yet achieve through propaganda what you failed to achieve with your NAP crafted away from the eyes of the other players to which you plead your case against your NAP betrayer.

Could it be that those who enter into non-aggression pacts intended to betray their fellow co-signatories to such pacts from the very beginning? Or could it be that the idea to betray their fellow NAP conspirator came to them, after they entered into the pact?

And, with that in mind, I harken back to what was said about Alamaze in reviews authored in years past in other PBM

magazines.

*"Alamaze has all the strategy, **intrigue**, fear and paranoia that makes a great game. It's a great value."* (Paper Mayhem Magazine - Issue #19)

*"Alamaze is one of the finest PBM games on the market, today. It is fast paced and exciting. It is full of all the action, **intrigue** and role-playing any player could ask for."* (Flagship Magazine - Issue #11)

Could it be that the player intrigue that Alamaze is famous for is still intact, all these many years after Alamaze first came upon the PBM scene?

Do the rules of the game preclude men from entering into NAPs to begin with? Do those very same rules preclude men from breaking NAPs whenever they want to?

Or is the grand objective to sow confusion amongst the players, so that the finger of blame may serve as a tool to distract them from the reality of what all the game allows, within the breadth and scope of its design?

Their advertisement in this magazine says Alamaze Resurgent in 2014! Is it time to tame the players? Or is Alamaze as blood thirsty a game to play, as it has ever been?

Of course, men are free to believe whatsoever they choose to believe.

NAPs are creatures that may well bite the hand that feeds them. This is not new knowledge. The history of play by mail gaming is replete with countless instances of player intrigue in the form of agreements and pacts crafted by men filled with guile going astray.

To play with fire is to run the risk of getting burned. Write that into your next pact!

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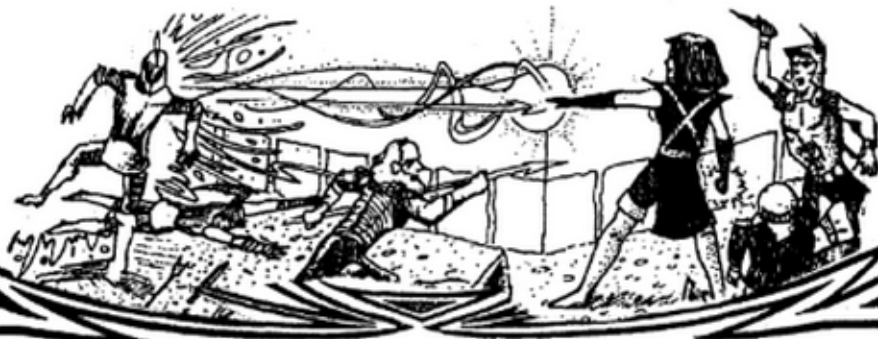
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Trade Wars

Gath-Edoras

Senior Lieutenant Tarlvsonn of the Dewiek Space Marines stood carefully balanced in the training room. Around him were scattered no less than five training droids. These 8ft tall robots were armed with a variety of sharp edged and chain weaponry, and could replicate the combat behaviour of several known species. Tarlvsonn studied their location neutrally, and snapped the command word. All five droids whirled into action, moving rapidly into a spread formation to better cover his blind zones. Tarlvsonn leaned towards the closest droid, and as it adjusted backwards out of his expected reach, swung back and slammed his own club into the neck socket of the droid rushing into what it had expected to be his unprotected back. Dropping low, he swiped the lower body of a second droid, dislodging it enough to crash into a partner and push it out of attack sequence. Hearing the quickly approaching buzz of a chainsaw, he dropped onto all fours as a blade swung where his head had been. Snapping upright, he parried the teeth of the saw with the guard of his club, temporarily jamming it, and with his free claw, swiped the neck area of the droid, ripping out its control thorax. Spinning, he then turned to face the fifth, which used a series of sharp lunges to force him backwards to the other two. Suddenly, it shot out a lightning-fast lunge, almost faster than the eye could see, Tarlvsonn's arm snapped down, and using the inverse counter strength of the droids weapon, he propelled himself into the air just as a droid from the rear let rip a lunge of its own, which pierced the robot opposite in its body

and remained there stuck. With an easy roll, he moved to the left of the remaining droid, which was carrying a boarding axe and a katana. After a short combat, he removed its head, and left it a burnt wreck on the floor.

At this, a loud clapping could be heard, and his fellow officer, Lunvist, appeared from the shadows. Large even for a Dewiek, Lunvist was famed for his drinking and brawling, though not necessarily in that order, "Nice, you seem to be slowing in old age."

Tarlvsonn looked down where a cut on his upper arm could be seen leaking blood gently. He shrugged, "Droid are droids. What is it you need?"

"Trouble, perhaps. Need you on the bridge"

Five minutes later, he arrived on the bridge to greet the Captain - a female Dewiek named Saggund. Nodding to the senior crew, he glanced at the view screen. As expected, it showed nothing.

"So?"

"Readings indicate we were followed through the jump gate, and have been scanned a couple of times, since, but not by anything we can see."

"So, why the view screen?"

The Captain waggled a claw on a toggle switch by the command console. "This is the computer generated star map for this area of space, orientated for the view screen ." The screen filled with a star map that resembled the viewport's original image, exactly.

"Yes, I can see, and it is the same"

"Not quite," she toggled the image, so it appeared transparent on top of the actual star map." Look at screen co-ordinates 5-16."

He looked, blinked, and looked again. 7-8 star systems in that area were disappearing in turn, then appearing again.

"Someone who is very well cloaked is following us."

Tarlvsson was impressed, in spite of himself. He knew the Captain had a reputation as an effective Trader, but had no idea she was this on the ball with regard to security.

"Trajectory?"

"They are getting closer. An hour ago, only two stars were disappearing. We estimate they will be here in half an hour."

"Plenty of time to prepare a 'warm' reception then."

Inside the freighter, an enormous crash followed by a loud, ominous creak could be heard, as the outside hull was firstly breached and then adjusted to the unexpected pressure changes when the pirate ship smashed into contact. The ship had suddenly showed itself ten minutes ago, and launched an almost immediate attack. This trader had been a rarity, armed with a Photon Gun, but this had done nothing other than apparently irritate the pirate, by scratching its paintwork and perhaps blowing up an engine or two. The lettering 'Prepare for Death' had been written in red across the black of the enemy hull, and after it had taken a few shots, now read, 'Prepare for eat,' but little else appeared to have been

done. Now, the trader's Marines stood ready to protect the ship. Tarlvsson's platoon were scattered in a pre-arranged pattern, weapons at the ready. With some pride, he surveyed his troops. None showed signs of excessive glee or fear. With professional interest, he turned his attention back to the likely assault point. Would the pirate use laser cutters, or just explosives, to breach the inner hull? Cutters preserved the cargo, but allowed the defenders more time to react, whereas bombs got them in faster, but could damage the cargo. Two thuds could be heard, and he nodded. Bombs it was. He mentally sent out the signal, "Take cover," and checked all his troops had disappeared from view, before ducking below a metal bulkhead, himself. Immediately after, a huge explosion ripped through the ship's light hull, sending metal shards ricocheting over the cargo hold. Waiting the stipulated five seconds, he swung up and aimed his gauss rifle at the hold. Just in time, as well, as hoards of pirates swarmed through the hole. Instantly, a fire fight erupted. The pirates were initially at a disadvantage, as the need to traverse a medium-sized hole into an unknown environment allowed them to be picked off. Soon, though, weight of numbers told with several of the Dewiek defenders starting to be hit, and Tarlvsson sent another mental signal to fall back. With pride, he saw his platoons shift into a fire and movement mode, with one platoon covering the retreat of the others.

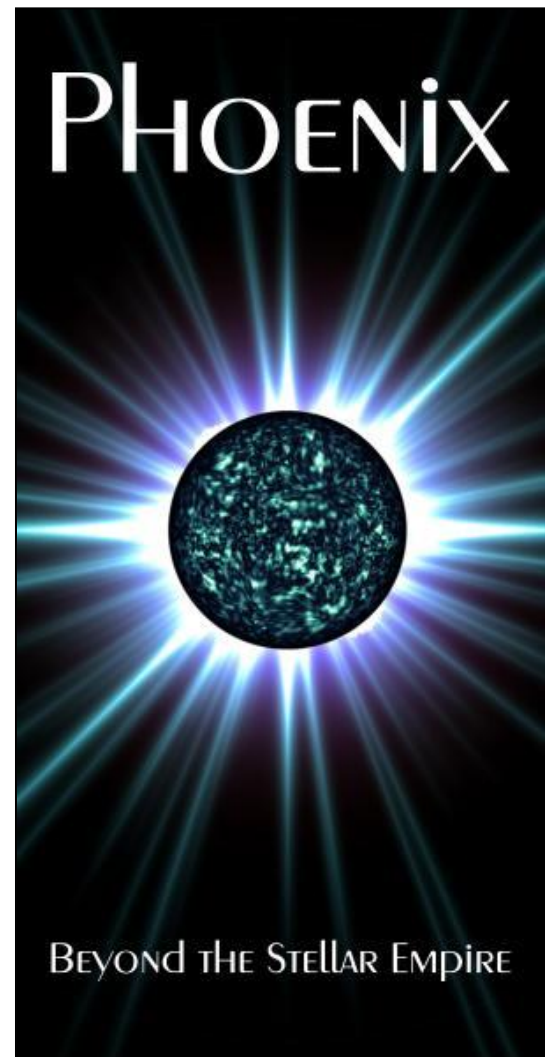
As the attackers gained more of a hold in the hold, they could spread out more and deploy heavier weaponry, with advanced warbots appearing. Tarlvsson moved his troops back faster. The balance would soon shift the attackers' way, entirely, and he had no wish to suffer the sort of casualties they had

already caused. The Marine next to him, who was shooting small controlled bursts, suddenly cursed, as his rifle ran out of ammo, but professionally, was up and firing within a second, with the speed born of practice and confidence. Rapidly, the troops moved out of the hold and into the ship proper, taking their wounded with them. As he left, he casually smashed a glass protective cover by the cargo bay double doors and pulled a lever, before running to take up the main defensive positions. Dewiek traders followed a fairly simple defensive philosophy. Without the bridge the ship was useless, so Dewiek bridges often had reinforced approaches and deliberate choke points. Access from the rest of the ship was easy to those who knew the way, and as his troops took position, he thanked the rigorous drills they carried out covering exactly this sort of scenario.

The pirates took a while to extricate themselves from the hold. First off, Tarlvsson had dumped the anti-fire foam system into the damaged hold, covering them in heavy duty resistant foam which had slowed them down. Next, the pirates had stopped to pillage whatever they could, and finally, they had had to be cautious, knowing the defenders were still around and combative. Eventually, the first scout had slowly stuck his head around the corridor, only to have it blown off by a beautifully placed rifle round. The rush, when it came, was strong, with the pirates deploying several war droids and flamethrowers. To no avail, though. They were cut down rapidly, leaving their corpses heaped in piles on the approaches. As the numbers built up, Tarlvsson thought sourly that the statement, 'Prepare for Death,' appears to have been an instruction to their own crew. Eventually, the pirate boarding party gave up, and almost

faded away back to their ship a much reduced shadow of their former selves. The defenders had let them go. Their job was to protect the ship, and not to glory hunt their way into a potential counter-attack, away from the prepared defensive positions. The pirate ship had disengaged and pulled off, disappearing into the void, leaving a god awful mess and a lot of corpses and badly wounded to tidy up.

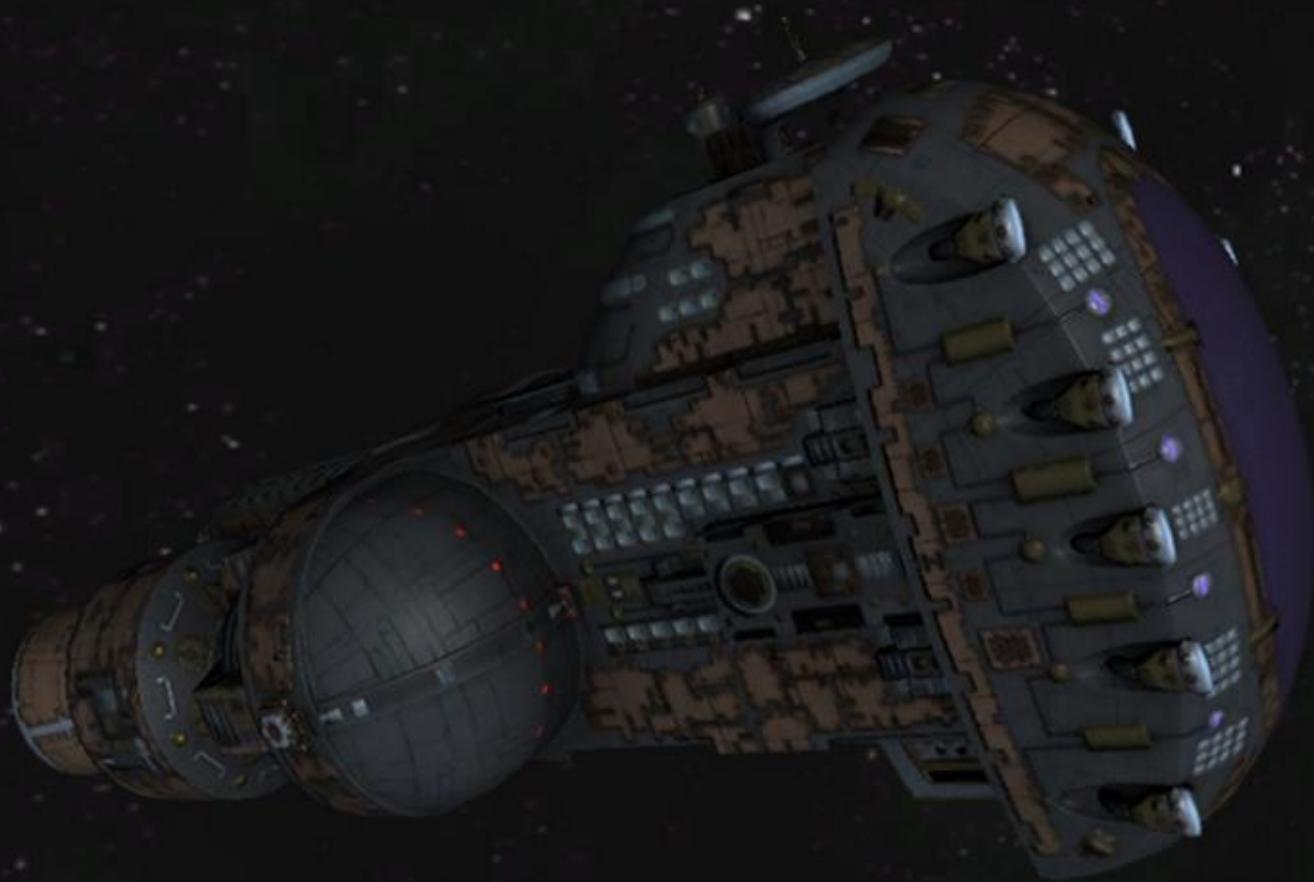
Tarlvsson finished the day surveying the wreckage of the now re-sealed cargo bay. As some human general had said a long time ago, 'His drills were bloodless battles, and his battles were bloody drills.' That was the way to victory. That, and a ship protected by Dewiek Marines, that is.



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Sailing the Electronic Winds

Looking at Numbers on Our Way to Somewhere

Charles Mosteller

While browsing the Wayback Machine, I happened upon a [tidbit](#) about The PBM Report, a PBM magazine of bygone days.

It stated that starting with Issue # 10, the PBM Report would be expanded to a 32 page format with a \$4 cover price. Madhouse USA had acquired the rights to The PBM Report from Ken Mitchell Graphics. Subscription prices for U.S. addresses was set at \$24, and for European addresses, it was \$38. This was for a year's subscription to the magazine, which was a total of six issues.

The price of a full page ad in The PBM Report was set at \$180. That was in 1999. In 2014 dollars, that same amount would be \$253.66, according to the [CPI Inflation Calculator](#) provided by the United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

If you're one of Suspense & Decision's advertisers, then you can calculate for yourself, whether you think that advertising with us is a good deal or not. This issue marks the fifth straight issue that we have not charged anyone anything for advertising within the pages of our magazine.

Granted, the figures for The PBM Report, notably Issue # 10, was for an actual print copy of the magazine. The initial print run for Issue # 10 was billed as one thousand copies, with 400 copies getting sent out to existing subscribers, and the remaining copies to be sent out as freebies to prospective subscribers. Our comparison is one of apples to oranges. Yet, it offers us a

starting point for comparison, just the same.

As I sit here and write this article in the early morning hours of March 24th, 2014, the PlayByMail.Net's Awstats software records, coincidentally enough, exactly 400 complete downloads of Issue # 4 of Suspense & Decision magazine. This figure is for the time period of March 1st to March 24th, 2014. Since it is 1:48 A.M. Eastern Standard Time as I type this, that means that this total does not include downloads for the current day.

Four hundred copies is not a particularly large number. But, it was accomplished without imposing monetary cost on either our readers or our advertisers.

On top of the 400 copies of Issue # 4 that were downloaded within a 23 day time span of an unfinished month of March, there had also been additional downloads of the previous three issues. Specifically, these figures are:

Issue # 1 = 75 copies

Issue # 2 = 69 copies

Issue # 3 = 86 copies

The total downloads for those first four issues, in just the month of March through the 23rd, alone, came to 630 copies.

The interesting thing to me is not the 400 downloaded copies of Issue # 4, but rather, the 230 downloaded copies of the three issues that preceded it. The real challenge, of course, lies in how to convert issue

downloads into converts to play by mail.

The PBM Report held a distinct advantage, in that Madhouse USA knew who every last one of the magazine's paid subscribers were. Me? I honestly have no way of knowing who all downloaded the various issues of Suspense & Decision magazine.

In order to publish an actual hardcopy magazine in print format, the most economical way to accomplish such is by printing in large numbers. Actual print copies embody certain advantages in the print format. But, electronic format is not without its own set of inherent advantages.

Whenever people like Joseph Bloch of the [Greyhawk Grogard](#) blog site give Suspense & Decision magazine a plug, there is no doubt that it really helps us on the numbers front. Joe once ran a PBM game called Sail the Solar Winds. How ironic it is, then, that it is largely through his plugs via his blog that our magazine got off to a decent start.

We may not be sailing the solar winds, but we sure are sailing the electronic winds. The numbers will likely continue to inch up, as we progress forward, with some variation in download numbers from issue to issue.

If you look beyond the download numbers, themselves, and look, instead, to the bandwidth numbers, what you will find is that the bulk of the site's bandwidth that was used, was used in the first three days of March. Out of 14.67 gigabytes of bandwidth used between March 1st and March 23rd, a full 8.59 gigabytes was used the first three days of the month.

For comparison's sake, the PlayByMail.Net website used a total of 3.88 gigabytes of bandwidth during the entire month of January 2014. February's bandwidth total

turned out to be 10.34 gigabytes.

In fairness, though, Issue # 4 was a total of 124 pages in length, if you include the front and back covers and their respective inside cover pages in your tally. The bandwidth used on March 1st, 2014, alone, was 5.05 gigabytes. It is the magazine that is driving bandwidth consumption for our site.

For all of 2013, our bandwidth usage was 28.49 gigabytes. For 2012, bandwidth usage was 12.09 gigabytes. For 2011, it was 10.05 gigabytes. For 2010, it was only 828.91 megabytes, less than a single gigabyte of bandwidth consumed.

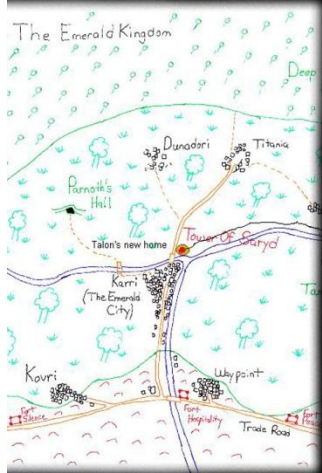
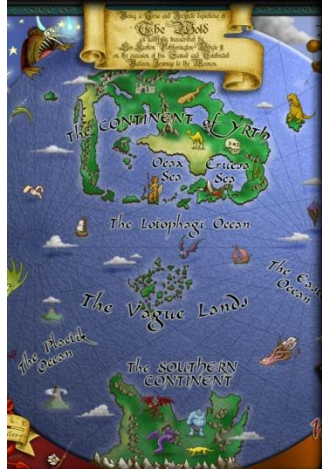
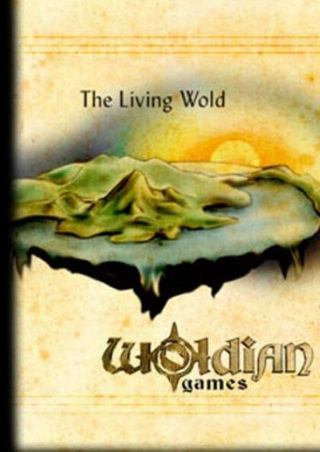
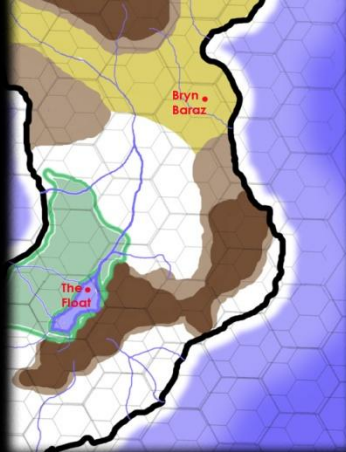
As websites go, PlayByMail.Net isn't a particularly busy site. We don't get new forum users, as often as we would like, but as with most things, we try to take a patient approach to that. The numbers tell a story. In fact, they probably tell more than one story, simultaneously. What they tell you may be something entirely different from what they tell me, though.

Considering the fact that most PBM sites on the Internet likely do not link to either the PlayByMail.Net website or to Suspense & Decision magazine, ours is an uphill struggle, at best. But, we continue to sail upon the Internet Ocean, as we search for a tipping point that lies somewhere over the horizon, in our bid to help the PBM industry to rebuild itself and its overall player base.

We have no map. We play it all largely by ear. It's slow progress, but even still, it's progress. Yet, while we may not always know just exactly where we are, in the overall scheme of all things PBM, it is becoming increasingly clear (to me, if to no one else) that we are getting somewhere. Now, whether somewhere is a big place or a small place, only time will ultimately tell.



Plateau City



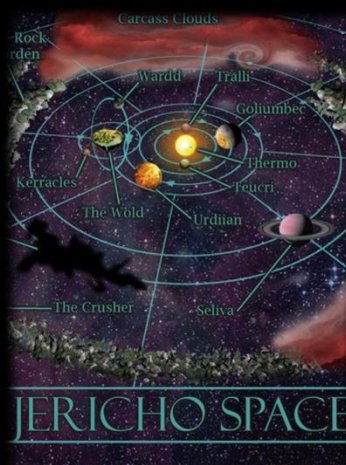
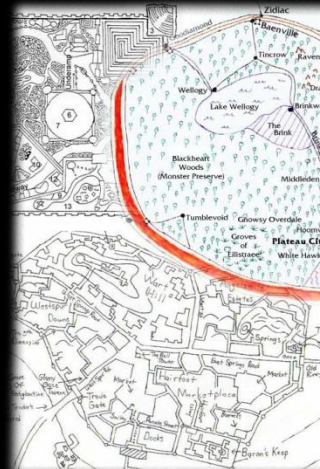
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Silverdawn, Squad Leader, and the Naked Orc

Reflections on role-playing in PBM

Bernd Jaehnigen

If you have spent any amount of time in MMO games, as our Jim Kemeny reported in issue 4 of S&D, you will find two broad groups of players -- role-players and power-gamers. Power-gamers put their focus on winning in-game objectives. They grind on their monster-spawning spots relentlessly to hit the next level, or they quest to earn that shiny piece of armor with a slightly higher enchantment, or they develop an array of "mule" characters (to handle the grind) and "tanks" to receive all the in-game buffs and engage in guild wars or other PvP action.

Role-players, on the other hand, put the focus on the in-game narrative. They want to achieve goals and upgrade their skills, to be sure, but only in keeping with how a character would conceivably interact with the world "logically". Forget "mules" and "grinding" and "gold farming" -- these people want to actually develop a persona, engage with others in a meaningful way, and advance an interactive storyline.

PBM players, in my experience, present the same broad groupings. Many will focus laser-like energy on victory conditions or territorial gain, while others will pepper their correspondence and other in-game interactions with personal flair, throwing playful insults at their opponents, perhaps, or casting their allies as noble comrades in a battle for life and death.

I also suspect, however, that the power-gaming lot is actually in it for more than the point score at game's end, but first a quick perspective on some relevant role-playing experiences.

One of the first PBM games I tried was called Silverdawn. It was a role-playing game set in a deeply detailed fantasy setting, with minimal rules and player-stats. Most of those technical details were kept hidden from players, and presented as needed in a narrative way. "Dirk emerged from battle with several small wounds, but knew he'd be more prepared for his next battle with the undead" -- this would be their way of saying "Dirk lost 5 hit points, and gained 58 experience, bumping him up to level 3."

Players were allowed to submit a limited narrative set of "orders" (either one or three pages.) They typically included lots of conditionals, like "Dirk holds up his flask of holy water first, to scare off the zombies. If they don't run off, he grabs a torch and waves it threateningly. If that doesn't work, he attacks the zombie nearest the cave entrance..." etc etc. In essence, each turn was a series of special actions.

The workload on the moderators must have been frightful! And at \$3/turn, they can't have been making much money. But their work was excellent. This game was ALL narrative. I ended up dropping out when I

realized that there was no real way to interact with other players. They tried setting up a system where players could hire other players for quests and the like, but apparently it never worked to the moderator's satisfaction. So while the game was engaging, it didn't feel right to just perpetuate a one-on-one storyline.

At some point after that, my brother became interested in the concept from the other end. He and his buddy posted an ad in some small game-company newsletter (Interplay), and to their great surprise received over a dozen inquiries for their proposed RPG-by-mail. The buddy dropped off, but my brother ran this game for years, using the famously simple and elegant "Fantasy Trip" game system. Players submitted characters and narrative backgrounds, and he set up a large unwieldy storyline to get them going.

Each turn, they sent in narrative orders, predicated on their player stats. My brother tended to have one large combat scene per turn, and played it out on a hex map, keeping a careful log of what happened. He then turned that into a combination game-narrative and stat-report. It took him days to run all this together, especially with the utterly primitive computer equipment we had at the time. (40-character text display! dot-matrix printer! upper-case-only text editor, with magic key combinations to change case!) The printing of 15-odd pages of turn results for a dozen players usually took a full day alone.

But, it was immensely enjoyable to all involved. It spawned a number of friendships, interstate visits, and in-game humor. A couple of players went on to set up their own games. The workload was too big once college started getting hard, and

became impossible once his new girlfriend had the gall to actually want to spend time with him. Such is PBM.

In this same general time-frame, my gaming chums and I continued to engage in a variety of board games, wargames, and odd role-playing endeavors. Remember wargames? These were the direct ancestors of PBM. And while you might think they (more than anything else) would be purely stat-driven -- a power gamer heaven -- we often ended up turning them into role-playing games.

Squad Leader was one of the best general wargame "systems" ever published, and we played it a lot. World war two squad-level combat, with intense realism and commensurately intense rules. Among other things, there were counters for "leaders" who could rally their troops and lead them in battle. Perhaps inevitably, we started assigning players to play specific individual leader counters, and one of us took the role of moderator, setting up aeries of battles along a certain historical narrative. We'd push our troops out against each other, take fire, and sometimes die. And in between battles, we had role-playing sessions where some field marshall or other would chew us out for losing a tank in that last town, or praise us for capturing a hilltop.

We did the same thing with "Dauntless", a wargame simulating WWII air combat in the pacific. Once, a set of Japanese zeros slipped past my fighter screen and strafed a truck convoy I was covering -- the chewing out my "commander" gave me lingers in my memory to this day. We turned another game -- "Beastlord" -- into something like Diplomacy, in that we left it set up in my room, and ran a turn or two every weekend.

In between, the 3 other players and myself would send each other notes and entreaties, attempting to gain advantage. I clearly remember lining up a 3-front attack against my nemesis in that game, only to find myself alone on the battlefield on the appointed turn. The elves had apparently leveraged my machinations to launch a surprise attack on the humans, and the hapless humans had made substantial errors in calculating how long it would take to reach the border. I was crushed, but it was also thrilling!

When I started playing Empyrean Challenge (precursor to today's Cluster Wars), it was all about power-gaming stats. It was a team game, and every homeworld had a group of players who had to learn to get along before hyper-drive technology advanced enough to bring the different teams within reach of each other. We didn't really role-play, but the narrative storyline in the game was ever-present and meaningful. We ran a newsletter, with various submissions from other players, including some biting arguments on team policies. Our personalities really came out at times, and each turn was exciting, whether or not we had a civil war.

In my weekly board-gaming group, we tend to focus on strategies -- each game ends that night, winner take all. So there's no actual role-playing. BUT, still, there is an in-game narrative that drives the interest and excitement. If all we wanted was a taste of strategy and conflict, we could play chess or poker. Instead, we keep shelling out \$60 for new boardgames that tickle not only our erstwhile gamer, but also our inner role-player.

One of these game-night fellows has been running a separate long-standing game of

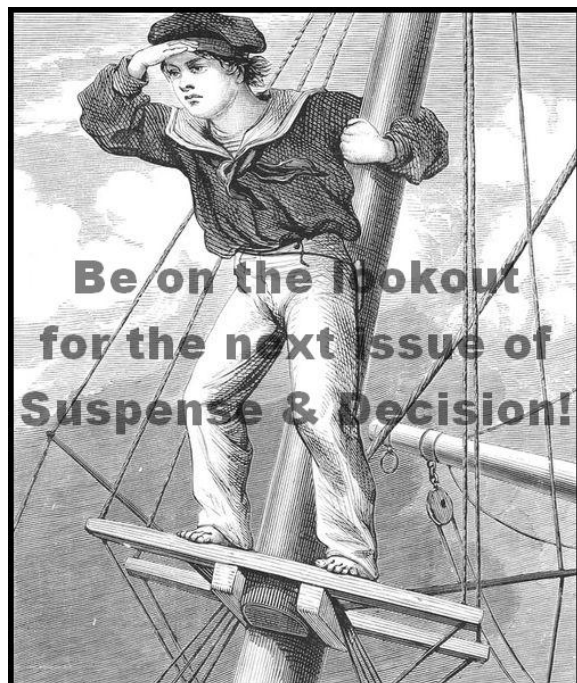
Neverwinter Nights with another set of buddies. This is a computer-game port of Dungeons and Dragons, rather elegantly done, and beyond the excellent single-player mode, there is an option for a dungeon master to design their own adventures, populate them with beasties, and open it up to players. The DM can actually flit around behind the scenes and "inhabit" the forms of every non-player character (or monster) in the game. Thus, "Dirk" and his pals might try negotiating a truce with the zombie lord, as the moderator "speaks" through the zombie's in-game presence.

We have all teased this friend during our board-game nights, imagining him sitting in his basement, wearing nothing but boxer shorts and an orc mask as he commands his legions of goblins to battle the invading "adventurers". They have literally been at this for years, and tend to hand over the dungeon-mastering to a different player each year to keep things fresh. We mock him, but we also wish we could join in. (He has never invited us -- sniff...)

I have found a similar "power/role-play" split running through modern PBM, with similar blurring of the lines. No matter how stat-heavy the game, the power gamers tend to be drawn into our engagements through the narrative. Our own S&D editor Charles and I clashed repeatedly in the all-too-short Far Horizons demo played out on the forum. We (and a handful of others) posted nascent game logs throughout, shifting easily between rules adjudication and role-playing. I found the mixing of the two extremely entertaining, and perhaps this shines a light on one of the best aspects of PBM.

We can and SHOULD engage with our fellow players and tireless moderators on both the

power-gamer and role-player levels. The power gamers help us stay on-track and enforce a sense of objective reality, and the role-players inject a high dose of adventure and (often) good humor. Let us embrace both, in our games and here in S&D!



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Wrestling the Graphics Demon

Is PBM prepared to pay the price?

Charles Mosteller

In the current issue of Suspense & Decision, the one that you are reading, right now (Issue # 5), Amber ruminates on the place of graphics in PBM.

Certainly, Amber is correct, insofar as artists can be really, really expensive. But, that does not mean that they necessarily have to be really, really expensive. If it were true that they always were, without exception, then this magazine would not be sporting the front covers that it has enjoyed having for five straight issues, now.

I definitely think that graphics have, not just a role - but a **key** role - in PBM. I just think that their importance is more critical on the advertising end of things, than on the game play end of things.

An advertisement is, when it is distilled down to its core essence, a form of temptation. The idea is to tempt people into playing a given game. I compare it to unlocking the imagination, **BEFORE** the person ever even tries the game. Thus, I think that it might behoove KJC Games to consider, anew, how to best tackle the graphics demon, as it relates to PBM gaming.

In her article, Amber said, *"One thing about players who have a long-standing tradition of roleplaying is that they all have very good imaginations, and if you have been playing an affiliation for 20 years, you know in your head what your ships look like, and there is no way that any artist is going to be able to capture it."*

That's all fine and dandy, for those who have been playing for twenty years, perhaps. But, if it is new players that one is looking for, you are dealing with an entirely different commodity. Imagination is, I think, the key to converting them!

To one who is new, will fractals, alone, suffice to grow the PBM player base? Or will it take more than fractals to light the fires of imagination in future generations of turn-based gamers?

From my perspective, fractal-based imagery holds little, if any, real hope of growing the Phoenix:BSE player base. While they do hold utility value for breaking up blocks of text on the Phoenix:BSE website, they are ill-suited for igniting the imagination.

It all boils down to return on investment, and new ads entail new costs, without guaranteeing results ahead of time. That's always been the case. But, either a game is worth advertising or it isn't.

As I see it, a lot of time, effort, and energy has been invested into making PhoenixBSE the game that it has evolved into.

PBM, as a whole, seems to have grown very averse to crafting new ads. Yet, if the old ads aren't doing the job that you want them to do, then why stick with what you already know isn't working? It's time to up the ante, and to create a new generation of ads for a new generation of gamers. Otherwise, what you are stuck with is the status quo.



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Hyborian War - Duel2 - and Forgotten Realms play-by-mail games

Hyborian War & The Road of Kings

A Partnership of Play-by-Mail Gaming

Robert M. Paquin

***Back, and forth the pacing continued. Bakah Longann stalked through his tent like a wolf searching for prey. "Things are going too well." he proclaimed to the air as he stood alone deep in thought. The spy reports showed that there may yet be some resistance to his plans for the south, but this did not dismay him. Rather he felt a cold chill in his spine as the game grew more intense.*

All was in order, yet he knew he must proceed with caution. He now had the King's full attention, and was manipulating the designs for the kingdom through advice to the great war-chief. He knew he could push the king where ever he desired. His past successes had made it so, and it would not be long before the king was his puppet to dance to a tune of his playing.

The General of the Keshani forces was now dispatched and Malowi would finally be granted those promises he had demanded for the deed. After all it hadn't been all that easy to sneak behind the enemy front and work his way to the opposing armies command post. Let alone assassinate the bastard General of Keshan without being noticed. Making a quiet escape.

Payment for the deed was still owed to the assassin known only as Malowi. Bakah would be sure it was delivered promptly. Money that would flow into those stealthy hands before the break of the new morn. These funds would of course be rendered with yet another offer of the same sort. Malowi had always been a greedy man, but skilled in his

dark craft of stealth and death. He would again receive word of one who should be dispatched, without prejudice, and if history was any indication, he would soon be just that. Dispatched and dead. Like all who stood between Punt and its goals soon would be.

The Army was ready and the forces had already arrayed in formation. Keshan's now leaderless armies encamped in their nation's stronghold and capitol would now perish for good. Shortly after, all of the lands once controlled by the Keshani would be under the control of Puntan forces. Those people from the Keshani lands already absorbed into the kingdom were easily adjusting to their new places in life. Most now saw the Puntan rulers more like liberators than conquerors. For truly their lives were immeasurably better now that they had stronger rulership to guide and control them.

The various war campaigns in the south had brought only victory, after victory. The troops of Punt rolled across the lands like a plague of locust. Consuming all that stood before them. Beating down any opposition, and taking many slaves who would soon toil for the greater benefit of their new masters. The savages in the jungle lands were ill equipped to stand before a well organized army. The rabble always came out in droves to fight and die. Their uncivilized methods of warfare better suited to game hunting than defending themselves against a determined foe like the Kingdom of Punt.

Emissaries had arrived from afar seeking the

graces of Punt, yet nothing had been finalized at this point. "Soon this will be remedied" the Chancellor thought, as he reached the far side of the tent. Turning over all the possibilities in his mind as easily as he turned to pace in the opposite direction once more. The offers seemed to play well into Bakah's immediate plans, and he would not miss opportunities that presented themselves freely. Talks continued in earnest as the diplomatic corps of Punt sought to insure that their homeland got the best part of any agreement.

Once more his spun on his heels, deepening the wear upon the carpeting's fabric. He knew he must remain wary of all this success, for feelings of security often bred complacency, and complacency led to disasters. There was much for Chancellor Longaan still to think on, and plan. So many things that needed attending and attention.

*The pacing continued...,***

~Hyborian War~

The Play-by-Mail game run by [Reality Simulations Incorporated](#). A game much like other PBM's in some ways, and so different than them at the very same time. It's a game based on, and that takes place in, a world that author Robert E. Howard created for his legendary and iconic character, Conan to adventure through.

Most PBM's have historically had very little real life interaction between players. In the days before the advent and popularity of the internet, most communication between players of PBM's took place in the form of written correspondence. A few players that grew to trust each other back then may have relied on phone calls as well. But, for the most part communications were severely

limited and time consuming. As can be said for many things in life..., that was then and this is now. Now there is the internet. A strange and often unpredictable land of intercontinental conversations.

[Hyborian War](#) has always enjoyed a good deal of loyalty from its player base. Mostly derived from the ranks of the many fans of Howard's original Conan stories. This group of loyalists was a driving factor in the creation of the few websites dedicated to the game, it's rules, and the storing of all types of information that aid players in their goals of conquest via envelope. The websites are almost as diverse as the nature of the game itself. There is however a site that emerges as a shining pinnacle from among them. It is that site which has gone above and beyond most of the others in its creator's attempt to bring real players together in a single place. A place specifically designed towards the mutual interaction and direct discourse of Hyborian War players. It is called The ROAD of KINGS, and can be found at www.warbarron.com. If, after you read this, you feel a small tug to check out the game of Hyborian War, I suggest you also take a quick look into The Road of Kings.

The short story above that you read was created and posted there as part of what they refer to as a Game Thread. Game threads exist for all of the games, and the posts in them take many forms. Some of the players will role play as the leader of their kingdom. Some will post stories comprised of things their kingdoms have gone through. Much like the story above. While others, still, will just talk in a normal fashion about that game's particular goings on. While the site has grown and evolved over the years, (starting originally as a simple newsletter and becoming what it is today) into a place where players discuss all manner of real life

topics, joke around with each other, and without a doubt talk about every aspect of the Hyborian War game. For the most part it remains a friendly little place, open and inviting to older and newer players alike.

While I never played a game of HW before the days of the internet, it's not hard to see how much of a difference a site like that can make to such a game. In the past, one would first need to request an address. Something that could only be done after the game had started. Then, they'd wait for that request to be approved before being able to conspire with anyone they didn't actually know personally. Today, it's not uncommon for 2 or more players to begin to conspire before a game even starts. Where once a player might fret about correspondence reaching an ally in time for the next turn. Today, a player's enemies and allies are just a few quick clicks away from a detailed report from their in game friends. Where there was previously a steadily declining interest, there is now a small niche of gamers for whom the site adds a level of continued interest that keeps them together and playing.

With the increase in communications that this site provides, the game has changed a little in some respects. Still, it's fundamental tactics and playability remain unchanged from the distant past of its modest beginnings. In fact one of the things most long time players can agree upon is a seemingly simple wish to have the game code updated. The longer a player has played often increases the strength of their wish for newer options in this game they've grown to love. Despite its relative simplicity and player lamented shortcomings, the game still enjoys a modest, loyal, and dedicated following. A following that will likely keep this game around for a good

while. The Road of King's website is no small part of the life breath that the game has inhaled since the creation of this little known website. It's my opinion that without that site, along with the handful of other Hyborian dedicated sites across the net, the game might have already vanished like so many of the PBM's from the early 80's.

Only a scant few offerings remain available these days to players whom enjoy such a format as a Play-by-Mail game entails. Hyborian War uses a system that allows a player to play a single game over the course of a year or more, while only placing so much of one's own actual time and attention into it. Not counting those moments of anticipation while walking towards the mailbox hoping for a set of recent turn results. If the instant gratification of computer gaming is more your want, Hyborian War may not be for you. But, if you're like me, a person that likes to think and plot over a small measure of time, this game may be just what you're looking for.

When I first encountered Hyborian War, it was quite by accident. I stumbled across a website while doing an unrelated internet search. I somehow found myself staring at a colorful page filled with all manner of intriguing text and wonderful images. It was www.GrimFinger.net. Not knowing what it was or what it pertained to, I explored that website and read a few things. While I looked around the site for a while I was soon greeted by a fine man who called himself GrimFinger. It was he who explained most of the game details to me and directed me to the RoK for more information. It took some time but after a few conversations with him, I found myself in a quite unlikely friendship of sorts with one Charles Mosteller. An odd friendship to be sure, but one that still remains to this day. It's that very same man

who I will soon be sending this psuedo-article that you're reading right now. You, as well as he, shall need to forgive my lack of reporting prowess. I consider myself more of a poet than a writer to be honest with you.

It wasn't too long after Charles and I first began to talk that I signed up for my first game of Hyborian War. I loved the game from the very start, and have played in many games of it since then. Through that game, and aided by the various sites, I made many new friends. None the same as the last, but pretty much all of them great people in their own ways. They are friends I still keep in touch with from time to time despite not having played in the past couple of years. It was these friends who all took part in teaching me the ins and outs of this quaint little gaming experience. Some of them simply telling me specifics, while others held all of their lessons for me confined to the parameters of the game. The latter type being an education by fire so to speak. Meaning that they all did their best to destroy me. Some of them failed, while others of them succeeded. By the end of my second game, I pretty much had it all figured out. That's when the real fun began. There is no other game that I've ever played which has the ability to facilitate so many friendships from such a grand spectrum of peoples from all over the globe.

Anyone interested in Play-by-Mail formats, I think would enjoy Hyborian War to some degree. While it's certainly not for everyone, anyone can learn and become well versed in it's best methods of play. Something that can't be said for some of the more complex PBM systems and games. It is a game with many subsets of game play actions. It has everything from warring armies to individual characters to command. There are diplomatic missions as well as missions of

intrigue and subterfuge. There are battles and raids against the enemy. And..., as it always is in games of conquest and nations, a player must learn to care for those provinces it has taken, while figuring out how not to lose what it has started with. The availability of informational access because of the dedicated sites make learning all of these things quite enjoyable and much easier than one might expect.

There are 36 playable positions in the Hyborian War game. That means there are always 31 - 35 other players that will all be vying for the top rank against you. That's 35 player kingdoms for you to turn into enemies or allies, or just to keep an eye on. As an added twist. None of the kingdoms are even close to being the same. You'll find as you go along your way that all of the kingdoms have different strengths and weaknesses. Each kingdom is also tasked with a different set of goals and imperial ambitions that directly relate to how they will be ranked. With such a wide range of starting positions and an even wider array of players, a person could play the same kingdom ten times or more and end up with entirely different results each time. Playing different kingdoms diversifies the experience of Hyborian War even more. It's this immensely diverse nature of game to game progression that I find to be a major drawing point for Hyborian War. You'll be asked to refine your tactics and change your in game desires from turn to turn and game to game. I've yet to encounter such a gaming experience quite like this one anywhere else.

On the Road of King's website there's fun filled banter and copious amounts of trash talking. There are allies from one game who are your worst enemies in another. It's a great place to learn the game and find out more about which kingdom you'd like to rule

and play. There are in depth dissections of many of the pros and cons of the game's 36 playable kingdoms. Above all there are real life friends just waiting to be made. Unlikely friends for sure, but once they're made, you very likely won't soon give them up. No matter how unlikely those friendships seem at first or how odd they might seem upon starting. It's a place filled with opinion and fact..., information and ignorance..., fun and fundamentals. Everyone I've seen go there has almost always been welcomed with the proverbial open arms of the current member's typing fingertips.

The game itself is one you can enjoy in as many different ways as there are kingdoms and players that play it. You could simply play the game in a way reminiscent of the days of old. Sending in your orders and awaiting the results with little or no interaction with any others. Or, you could jump in head first to the interactions on the websites dedicated to it. Delving deep into the many conversations that take place upon them. Making friends as you go. Perhaps a little of both styles might be the most advisable pathway. Just be warned, the game can be enjoyable enough to entreat you to join a few games too many. While not overly expensive, in and of itself, a person can easily find themselves in too many games at once. A thing I've seen happen from time to time. I feel that this happenstance takes a lot away from the initial enjoyment level that caused this to happen in the first place. Like all things in life, moderation is the wise man's foundation.

So tell me, oh prince..., are thou ready to play King in an Age undreamed of ?

"Know, oh prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars."

~Robert E. Howard~

***Bakah, was surprised by the unannounced entry of the King's personal messenger. The man burst through the flaps of his tent as though the world had been alight with fire. His breathing was ragged, and it was apparent that he must have run the whole length of the province to reach him. The man could not be described as young, but no so old as to warrant such labored breathing. Yet here he stood dripping of sweat, and quite short on breath.*

Chancelor Longaan did not care for the interruption however , and quickly sought to ascertain the reasoning behind this intrusion on his planning. "What is it, that you think is worthy of such an affront to my privacy ? " Bakah asked the weary fellow, who was now gripping at his knees in search of air for his lungs. "If I decide you are wasting my time, I know a small hole in hell that you will be placed into, by my own hand !"

Straightening as quickly as the tree will rebound from a gust of wind, the man stared directly into the eyes of his be-rater. "Stay the foul tongue lashing Longaan, for I only need fear my King. A lesson you would do

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well to learn, and unless I miss my guess you will be taught it soon enough. " Bakah stricken to anger by the words spoken with a lack of respect he was not accustomed to, began to cross the small distance that separated the two. The man made no move to flee , or cower, but instead held forth a parchment that bore the seal mark of the King. "Look upon the words of your master, Longaan, before again you act too rashly. You are sure to find some wisdom still buried in your clouded mind. At least enough to remove from your hand that knife you would cut me with."

Bakah Longaan began to realize that this messenger would not be so bold unless he had the backing of the King. Releasing his grip from his blade, and snatching the missive from out of the unruly man's hand

he began to read the King's wishes. The note was short, and to the point. It left no room for misinterpretation. The ten words contained therein left him uneasy, even though there was no way to tell what would come of them. It read; You will report to my tent with the rising sun. "You may tell our King I will be present before him as the sun does rise." Longaan said meekly.

As reply, came a mocking bow from the disrespectful, messenger to the King. "As you command Chancellor." He said..., using a tone that matched the bowing. Then he turned and left Bakah stunned , and thinking.

*Longaan began to pace.....***



PBM player Robert Paquin is a seasoned veteran of Hyborian War.



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The Faery Chronicles

Steve Jobin aka Zigic

In Issue 3 of Suspense and Decision, I detailed a series of special actions to show how they could impact the game outside of the normal range of orders that can be issued. Special Actions cost money, though, so as a demonstration of how Phoenix has plenty of suspense and decision (making) that can be done with positions that are free to run, I thought I would submit a series of a blogs covering the conquest of Elf – a moon in the Faery system. (I thought Faery Chronicles had a better ring to it than “Elf Chronicles”...)

The key participants were the Empire forces – made up of the Imperial Services (IMP), Confederate Forces (CNF), Galactic Trade & Transport (GTT), the Confederate Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federation of Explorers and Traders (FET), and the Confederate Noble House, House Liqueur (HLQ).

These were taking on the Detinus Republic (DTR).

At first glance, 6 affiliations versus 1 seems a disproportionate mismatch, but the DTR’s stellar armada was believed to be the largest and possibly most advanced fleet in the Peripheries, and at the start of the main battle, the DTR would actually have a slight advantage in ships numbers – though the Empire fleet had a greater proportion of capital ships.

This blog covers just short of three game weeks, with a summary of the day-to-day events listed below.

Between stardates 212.22.2 through to 212.24.5 the Empire-DTR conflict heated up, culminating in the grandest battle in the Peripheries to date. Here follows a summary of the battle and events leading up to it, as detailed by IMP political Bratislav Zigic.

Stardate 212.22.2

A DTR strikeforce of 30 capital ships and 24 destroyers attacks a HLQ platform orbiting the planet Rhea, in Titan – a system claimed by IMP. This follows several similar raids by Detinus forces in the system, which had prompted responses from Empire Cruiser Squadrons that would attempt to intercept the raiding forces. The HLQ raises the alarm to the other Empire affiliations who attempt to see if ships can be sent to support the HLQ platform.

Note: a “platform” is a fixed position that is usually used as a weapons platform to provide support to starbases.

212.22.3

A GTT destroyer squadron of 20 ships and a single IMP cruiser are dispatched to Rhea to provide support to the HLQ platform. As the ships make the jump into the quadrant of the planet, their crews are horrified to see the main DTR battle fleet of some 993 ships lying in wait. All Empire ships are lost in short order in the trap.

Whilst the victory is complete, it is suspected that the DTR would have been disappointed with the number of ships that fell into the trap as previous responses to raids had been

in greater numbers. That was partly dictated by the bulk of the IMP and GTT ships having already started a manoeuvre of their own.

Indeed, the news presents the Allied Command with an opportunity. A ground assault had already been planned for the DTR starbase Sapphires Nest on the moon Elf in the Faery System to take place the next week. This base was deep within the Detinus Republic periphery. Until now the Allies had mostly restricted themselves to conflict in space claimed by the Imperial Services, but had planned to open a new front. Upon hearing of the position of the DTR fleet, the Commander-in-chief of the ground forces states his case to bring the ground assault forward to the Allied Command.

With the main Detinus fleet in Titan, and with the ground assault equipment in strike range of Faery, it is agreed that the ground assault should be brought forward in the knowledge that it will take three to five days for a large proportion of the DTR Armada to get back to the conflict zone. This is a risky gambit though – the Allied fleets are split between the GTT and IMP forces moving from Imperial space and CNF, CIA, and HLQ forces moving from Confederate space. The original plan had been for the navies to combine to prior to staging the assault to provide cover for the ground forces. For the initial ground assault, there will be limited naval support.

Another concern is that a DTR spy ship was blown up in orbit over the IMP starbase *Tuzanor* in the Titan system. This was the latest in a line of these spy ships. The Titan system is considered by many to be the ancestral home for many of the Hive race, and the DTR includes several factions of Hive heritage. The DTR had shown a lot of

interest in the system, and with the DTR stellar armada in Titan – and the likely political motivations of key Detinus Senators – it raises the question: is the DTR about to stage a ground assault of their own?

After some deliberation the go ahead is given, and naval forces are instructed to make haste for Faery. *Tuzanor* is instructed to batten down the hatches and the message is sent out to Allied raiding parties to step up harassing attacks.

212.22.4 D-Day.

Massed freighters ship thousands of troops from their staging point to Elf. Ground Force planners have commandeered a host of freighters that enter orbit and land under the cover of cloak to deliver troops and tanks to a quickly expanding ground party. The detailed planning for the logistics behind staging this ground assault are rewarded as surprise is complete.



Despite some losses in transit, Allied Ground Forces quickly form up, establish a beach head, and then make good progress against the stunned defenders of *Sapphires Nest*. The Allied force is lead up by Jones Marauders, a unit that had previously wrestled the starbase *Hidden Abyss* in the Adamski system from the DTR and as such has great experience in the shock assault tactics being employed. In his first report from the

frontlines, the commander reports successfully establishing 24% control of the base.

In the Quad, a squadron of 26 IMP warships, plus 6 supporting HLQ ships begin to attempt to disrupt DTR reinforcements to the base, blowing up 3 freighters. The next 24 Hours will be a nervous affair for the Captains and crew of these ships as it is uncertain whether the DTR have naval forces in the vicinity. The crew are emboldened though, at the progress being made on the ground. A call to arms is sent to the Confederate Navy to provide support.

In Titan, HLQ scouts confirm that the DTR Armada have held their ground. It is five jumps between Titan and Faery – the race to Elf begins.

212.22.5

The DTR armada begins to move from Titan. Scans from IMP scouts suggest some of the fleet have passed through Acropolis, whilst other scouts suggest movement of other elements within Titan. It is unclear whether these ships - which include the DTR's 200 hulled capital ships - have moved out of the system at this point, or whether they have manoeuvred within the system. The exact disposition of these two forces is also unknown, and furthermore it is unclear as to whether the DTR Armada has split into just two or more fleets.

On Elf, more troops are poured into the conflict by both sides. Jones Marauders report that troop ships successfully evacuated the scene. A number of DTR veterans have been smuggled into *Sapphires Nest* to help slow down Empire progress – wiping out a fresh arrival of 1800 light tanks – but Allied forces push on steadily, clawing territory in tough complex-to-complex

fighting and establishing more than 50% control of the base.

Meanwhile, operatives in DTR *Sapphires Nest* close down hiport complexes that would allow a ship in orbit to deliver goods, in an attempt to hinder the DTR resupplying the base with more equipment.

In the outer rings of Faery, a Confederate squad engages DTR freighters, destroying two DTR troop transports. Whilst the news that more DTR troops have been prevented from reaching the battle on Elf is welcomed by the grunts on the deck, the DTR are now alerted to the CNF taking an active role in the mission.

A further 380 ships of the Confederate Navy arrive at D12 Faery. In Space no one can hear you scream, but a loud cheer is made by the IMP/HLQ advance screen stationed there.

212.23.1

Rapid response elements of the DTR fleet make it to Faery. Some 523 ships cross paths with a Confederate force of just 55 ships in D13, reducing 11 ships to debris and badly denting many more.

A further 78 DTR ships are spotted in D15 of Faery. Intelligence confirms that many of these two forces were part of the Detinus armada that were in Titan. There is grudging admiration for the DTR's ability to move so many ships that distance in such a short time.

These DTR forces are made up mostly of 50 hulled ships with jump engines that allow ships to jump between systems twice as fast as standard jump engines. There are, though, a significant number of 100 hulled ships that were equipped with Hyperdrive

jump engines that allow larger ships to match the 50 hullers for speed. Hyperdrives require some particular rare ores, but can also explode if damaged, so their usage in warships is limited.

The presence of the remainder of the DTR Armada – which includes a number of 200 heavy hulled ships – remains a mystery until an Imperial cruiser manages to report running into 488 ships in the Arachnid system before being vaporised. The Arachnid system is a Detinus system that is 2 jumps from Titan, but still 3 jumps from Faery. It takes 100 TU's to make a standard jump, and 60 TU's are credited each day. A ship can "stock" up to a maximum of 300 TU's. As such it will take this force at least 2 days to reach Faery, though with other movement required to get to Elf it is assumed 4 days is more realistic.

This news establishes that the Armada broke up into 2 fleets – a fast response force that is now in Faery, and the main task force of Capital ships in Arachnid.

In the Detinus-claimed T.Tauri system, a GTT heavy cruiser raiding squadron of 11 ships runs into a DTR squadron of 32 ships. The GTT suffer heavy casualties of 5 ships.

In the Detinus Badlands system, a DTR freighter is intercepted and destroyed by CNF forces.

On Elf, the ground assault continues to lose momentum as DTR reinforcements continue to be squeezed through the blockade. Heavy casualties are reported and there are serious concerns that the gambit has failed. However, the thought of giving up the assault at this stage – at the cost of so many – is found abhorrent and the ground forces are encouraged to press on, whilst as many

reinforcements as can be gotten hold of are rushed to the front.

In the first 2-3 days of the conflict approximately 50 DTR freighters have been destroyed as part of the blockade or whilst docked at Sapphires Nest.

In the DTR-claimed Wanderer system, an Imperial Scout investigates a DTR outpost in G13. This appears to be a deep space recreation complex and is assumed to have been the staging point of the DTR Armada before setting the trap in Titan.

212.23.2

An Imperial cruiser, part of a cruiser squadron attempting to track the DTR armada in Arachnid, runs into a Detinus spotter platform in the D13 quadrant of the system. The Captain decides to attack but in doing so alerts the Republic of his presence.

A second Imperial cruiser jumps directly onto the DTR main fleet, and whilst quickly vaporized reveals that this fleet is still 3 jumps from Faery. Hopes are raised that pickets may be able to be put in place in the T.Tauri system to further slow down their progress.

The bulk of the Imperial fleet arrives at D12 Faery, linking up with the Confederate forces already in place. Jump engines are allowed to cool off whilst DTR freighters continue to be attacked to prevent them re-supplying the base.

Meanwhile, scouts reveal that the two DTR forces in Faery have formed up at D15.

On Elf, the DTR rename *Sapphires Nest* as Helms Deep, but the move is in vain as Allied Ground Forces seize control of the base. Seeing how the tide has turned a

number of Elf militia quickly swear allegiance to the Emperor and turn on DTR forces.



Messages of congratulations are sent across the subspace to Jones Marauders.

Consideration is given to attempt to engage the DTR fleet at D15 the next day, but in the end the command council opts to continue to attempt to prevent DTR supplies from reaching Elf, which has several smaller DTR bases.

In the Wanderer system, the Imperial scout docks with the DTR recreation complex spotted the previous day. Troops overwhelm the unprotected employees on board and have a spell of R&R like no other. The ship later undocks with 3275 guilders purloined from the facility, and having daubed Long Live the Empire at every opportunity. The 10 employees remain unharmed, albeit bound and gagged....the Captain of the scout has a pang of concern that DTR forces will neglect to rescue them, but then decides that this way the employees should be thankful that the option to just atomise the outpost was not taken.

212.23.3

The cruiser at D13 Arachnid is attacked by a squad of 6 DTR light forces. Other members of the cruiser squadron make no

observations of the main DTR fleet, though a couple of other ships are observed.

Furthermore, pickets are just out of range to reach key locations in T.Tauri – contact with the main DTR fleet has been lost.

In Faery the DTR fleet at D15 moves to D13. Questions are raised as to whether an opportunity to catch half of the DTR fleet may have been missed. The Allied fleet, though, has maintained a stranglehold on Elf.

On the surface, Allied forces continue to drive out the remaining DTR forces at the renamed Helms Deep base. Attempts to board DTR freighters docked at the starport are made, though – with a couple of exceptions – most fail.

5 CNF and 28 GTT Raiders intercept and destroy 2 DTR freighters in D12 Badlands, one of which is a troop transport.

Meanwhile there are rumours of strange goings on in the Straddle system and the appearance of newly discovered systems filtering through. For most though they remain rumours and the focus remains firmly on the job at hand.



These strange goings on are later to be described as the Boltzmann Brain event.

Imperial scientists suspect that the DTR have secretly had control of an ancient alien complex that had the power to restructure the fabric of known space – and perhaps in the hope it would disrupt the Empire offensive – pressed the big red button. This though has never been confirmed by the Republic.

As the Allied Command try to establish the location of the missing Detinus fleet, GTT scouts report the sighting of several ships. Their location is Badlands G13, and they are known to have been part of the main DTR fleet.

The main DTR fleet are just one jump from Faery.

The news is relayed to the Empire forces in Faery, with crews are informed to prepare themselves for the battle of our times.

212.23.4

The DTR stellar armada engages the Allied fleet at D12 of Faery.

In total the DTR field 1027 ships, though a large proportion of these are 50 hulled. The Allied presence is 985 ships (54 HLQ, 180 IMP, 195 GTT, 57 CIA, 79 FET and 420 CNF) though, whilst having fewer ships, the Empire forces command more Capital Ships and hold a 50% advantage in the number of hulls. For most Imperial Servicemen, this is the first time they have been in a major fleet battle with the DTR in which they enjoy local superiority. Many Confederate servicemen go into the battle fighting against those whom they once fought alongside. United under the same Emperor, it is time to make new blood oaths.

A number of the DTR ships retreat as soon as contact is made, which further adds to the

advantage the Allied forces hold – especially as many of the ships are the 200 hull Liberators.

There is no time to chase them though as there are still plenty of DTR ships in the battle.

At the end of the days battle, some 15 DTR ships are blown up and a further 57 suffer an Integrity Breakdown.

This comes at a cost of 8 Allied ships, 2 from each of the CNF, CIA, GTT and FET. Of particular note the Allies destroy 11 150 NH Annihilator Class carriers which had provided mass Space Interceptor screens, though the DTR still have a further 29 active.

The DTR also suffer heavy losses to their 50 hulled cruisers and destroyers and 5 100 heavy hulled ships.

Allied losses are seven 100, and one 150 heavy hulled ships which all took heavy damage after being singled out by missile wielding Liberators.

The unluckiest ship of the day is the DTR *Corsair 9-6* (47554) which falls apart after a critical hit to the Engines at just 34.1% hull damage. Meanwhile the damage control crews work overtime on the DTR *Carrier* (81219) as the ship makes awful creaking noises at 73% hull damage but still holds together.

On Elf, the Allied force tightens its grip on Helms Deep, wiping out the remaining Detinus defence force.

In G12 a lone CNF warship prevents a lone DTR warship from joining the conflict at D12, and the two go toe to toe. The DTR ship probably wins the round on points, but both vessels remain barely scratched.

In Arachnid, 4 more ships from the Cruiser squadron that were assigned to track the Stellar Armada movement are now reassigned to move to D13 to engage the DTR force there. However the DTR similarly increase their numbers to 10 - albeit some of the ships are of a support function. The original IMP cruiser breaks up as it is caught trying to evacuate.

212.23.5

Day 2 of the Naval battle sees a few Allied reinforcements filter through to increase the presence to 1000 ships. The DTR field 771 ships including 12 reinforcements.

The advantage remains with the Empire, but they suffer 22 losses whilst inflicting 53 losses on the Republic. It is noted though that a further 57 DTR ships are heavily damaged (30%+ hull integrity) and 39 moderately damaged (20-30%), whilst the numbers are 22 and 33 respectively for the Allied forces.

In the two battles at Faery D12 combined hull losses stand at;

DTR 125 ships of which 5400HH, 3475 NH, 525LH

Allies 30 ships totalling 4000HH

It is suspected though that several more DTR vessels may have suffered Integrity Breakdown when leaving combat, with a number of Allied captains reporting firing on ships leaving the scene.

The luckiest ship of the day is *Musket S6* (77412), which manages to survive at 70% Hull damage, meanwhile the CIA *Golem* takes a critical hit at just 7.2% at the hands of the DTR *Term 2* - the Gunnery Control Officer is nicknamed "Sniper".

On Elf, Empire Ground Forces press their campaign and start to assault the second largest DTR base on the planet - *Ruby's Nest*. Initial reports are positive and commanders are upbeat that they have the momentum to arrest control of the base.

In Arachnid, the tide turns further against the Imperial Cruiser Squadron which, whilst reinforced by 7 more ships, sees a further 12 DTR ships join the skirmish. This includes 11 Liberators. Severely outgunned, another cruiser is lost and a several ships are heavily damaged.

212.24.1

Jones Marauders joins up and take direct command of the ground assault forces on Ruby's Nest, which in turn starts an artillery barrage against Helms Deep. Further inroads are made, though it is evident that some DTR freight is still getting through.

In the Orbital Quad, the space battle rages for a third day. DTR ship numbers amount to 732 ships, whilst the Allied fleet is down to 953 ships as some vessels move out to replenish supplies. The DTR suffers 12 ships blown up outright, and a further 75 ships suffer an Integrity Breakdown. However, the Empire losses are 5 blown up and 44 ships suffering Integrity Breakdown.

49 of the DTR losses are 50 hulled ships, so whilst the ship losses are approximately 2:1 in the Empire favour, the difference in hulls lost is not so great.

The unluckiest ship of the day is DTR *Musket 10*, which suffers an integrity breakdown at 24.7% hull damage after critical damage to the magazine. Luckiest ship is DTR *Musket* (59562) which the Captain manages to hold together with emergency supplies of gaffer tape at 73% hull damage.

In T.Tauri D13, an IMP fleet heading towards Faery runs across a light DTR squadron of 5 warships and 6 freighters. The DTR warships fight valiantly to give some of the freighters - including a troop transport - an opportunity to escape. All 5 DTR ships are blown up, and whilst three freighters manage to escape. The other three are not so lucky.

In Arachnid, the IMP Cruiser squadron withdraws in the face of overwhelming odds, though not before another ship breaks up

In G13 Badlands, a GTT Raiding Squad of 7 ships intercepts and blows up a DTR freighter.

212.24.2

In the Quad the fleet battle rages for a fourth day as 939 Allied Ships face up to 656 DTR ships, more Allied ships had moved out in order to resupply as munitions began to dry up though an additional 60 ships arrived. DTR forces see 20 more Liberators arrive at the scene.

After intense combat, the Empire forces inflict 63 losses on the DTR fleet. However, this comes at the cost of 53 of their own ships. Furthermore a large number of the Allied losses were 200 hulled ships - albeit lower mark versions - whereas the DTR has lost just 9 of their Liberators. The day belongs to the Republic.

Analysis of the basic Liberator design shows a 200 Crystal Hull coupled with 317 Armour Plate of mkIII level, making them an extremely tough nut to crack - especially with extensive high mark point defence. The ability to seemingly shrug off much incoming fire is a credit to the Venetian shipyards and their presence at the battle helps to counter the Empire's numerical advantage. There are several weapons variants, but it is the M

design in particular that is becoming particularly feared by Empire crews.

There is some consolation for Empire forces though, as some 62 Detinus ships are reported to have approximately 30% or more Hull damage, whilst the Allied numbers are just 25 ships.

The luckiest ship of the day is DTR Carrier E6 (31209), which after unauthorised use of the Captain's stapler, holds the hull together at 67.2% integrity. Unluckiest ship of the day is DTR *Musket 9-10* (77795) which breaks up at 30% hull damage after a presumed reactor leak.

Better news for the Empire on the surface of Elf, as return artillery fire from Helms Deep counters the DTR's artillery battery fire from Ruby's Nest. This is a short lived artillery duel though, as Jones Marauders press their charge and take the DTR base.

The Empire artillery battery then turns its attentions to a third base, DTR *Iolites Nest*. However, 2 DTR platforms in orbit continue their own battery of Helms Deep along with some warships that have escaped the battle in the Quad and moved into orbit.

212.24.3

Whilst the results of the previous day had given some Empire Commanders some jitters, news from the planet surface, plus approximately 40 more reinforcements, helps embolden crews. Allied ship numbers now stand at around 886 warships whilst the DTR fleet is down to approximately 583 and the numerical advantage begins to tell as 72 DTR ships are destroyed for the loss of 36 Empire ships. Further the DTR loses another 12 Liberators and 24 are considered to be critical (30%+ damage). Another 18 are considered to be heavily damaged (20-

30%). There are another 128 Liberators, however, that are considered to be in good fighting condition.

The Captain of the DTR *Interceptor* (90937) would have thought he/she would have been in contention for best use of chewing gum when the damage control crews manage to hold the ship together at 80.1% damage, but is pipped by DTR *Musket* (59728) which holds together at 85%. If somehow either ship survives to tell the day, a sponsorship deal with Wrigley's will be forthcoming.

Meanwhile over on the DTR *Musket S7* (82393) it seems that a couple of rounds from a couple of Confederate ships that effectively bounced off the hull are enough to tip it over the edge at just 14.1% hull damage.

Targeted by CNF *Self Made* (9947)
- 0 [62] Damage

Targeted by CNF *Everything and nothing* (63128) - 0 [62] Damage

INTEGRITY BREAKDOWN - Ship
reduced to debris

On Elf, Jones Marauders establish 100% control of Ruby's Nest, whilst - after numerous painful previous attempts of trying - a 5000 hull platform in orbit is successfully boarded. This will be a relief to Helm's deep which has had suffered constant fire raining down upon it. There is, though, a second platform that continues to bombard Helms Deep.

Furthermore, numerous Marine deployments are made to seize control of 12 freighters, whilst several troop transports and larger freighters are destroyed.

Helms Deep continues its bombardment of DTR Iolites Nest, which responds in kind.

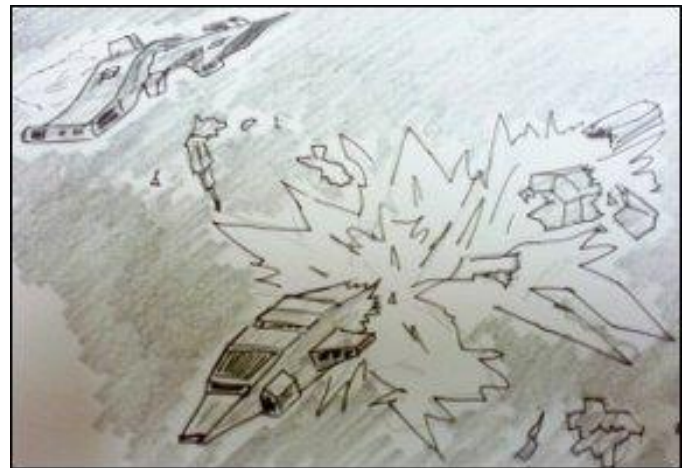
212.24.4

On Elf, the disparate *Ruby's Nest* defence forces are finished off in short order, whilst an artillery barrage is maintained on *Iolites Nest*.

Empire forces attempt to assault two more Republic starbases - DTR *Emeralds Nest* and *Iolites Nest*. Commanders report good progress in their initial reports, though there is a wariness that the Republic have not given ground lightly so far.

In orbit of Elf, Imperial Marines board two Dragonwing freighters. The remaining DTR Controlled platform turns its fire on the captured platform, bringing relief to Helms Deep.

In the Quad, the bulk of the DTR Stellar Armada withdraws from Faery D12, leaving just 111 ships to cover the retreat against 862 Allied ships.



63 DTR ships are either Blown Up or suffer Integrity Breakdowns. 5 of these ships are Liberators.

The Empire is now presented with the question of whether to attempt to hunt down

the DTR fleet, finish off the remaining DTR ships in the quad, or split the fleet in an attempt to do both.

Analysts ponder whether what had seemed like a turn in the tide in the DTR's favour on 24.2 had possibly masked the true picture of the battle and encouraged the Republic Command to fight on longer than they should.

The luckiest ship of the day is the DTR *Liberator-R* (42620), which – despite initial confused looks at how best to weld crystal back together – is kept together by the resourceful damage control crews at 64.5% hull damage.

Unluckiest ship of the day is DTR *Musket 11-6* (37624), which breaks up at 20% hull damage. The break-up of this ship goes to show that every point of damage is crucial.

Targeted by CNF *Self Made* (9947) - 2 [62] Damage

Targeted by CNF *Everything Everything* (27962) - 0 [93] Damage

INTEGRITY BREAKDOWN - Ship reduced to debris

Some readers may recall that the CNF *Self Made* also claimed a kill for 0 damage the previous day, which presumably puts this Captain forward for the most "Economic Use of Weaponry Award". Rumours that the FET – known to like ways to cut costs – have approached the Captain to join their ranks have yet to be confirmed.

Over the course of battle, the CNF *Self Diagnosis* (38937) has claimed the part in the most kills – being involved in 14 separate confirmed kills. However it is noted that it only managed to actually inflict 108

damage (another potential FET recruit), giving the Captain the not quite so prestigious "Golden Putting The Boot In When They Are Down" Award.

In terms of damage done, the CIA *Rukh* (77585) inflicts 51,523 damage spread across 5 targets. It can claim 2 single handed kills of a DTR Liberator and an Anhilator. It should be pointed out though that this does not adjust for size, and the *Rukh* is a 400 hulled alien construct ship, so it is awarded the "Knock of Faery / Biggest Bully"* award.

* *depending on who you ask*

Top Ships by damage inflicted [overall position]

CIA *Rukh* (77585) - 51,523 [1st]

CNF *Emperor of London* (28441) - 22,848 [54th]

DTR *Liberator-M* (80080) - 51,485 [2nd]

FET FPG *Dragon King 03* (74865) - 14,276 [237th]

GTT SG *AKG-04 Sweet Spot* (54118) - 30,840 [13th]

HLQ *Cerberus 04* (96856) - 21,201 [54th]

IMP *Challenger* (36076) - 46,700 [3rd]

* * *

In other news, a force of 19 DTR ships fleeing D12 Faery are caught by a GTT squadron of 18 ships, plus a supporting IMP Heavy Crusier at D13. The DTR lose a further 4 more ships, two of which are Liberators.

In Arachnid D14 a DTR patrol spots a straggling ship from the IMP Cruiser

Squadron and inflicts light damage before it has an opportunity to escape.

212.24.5

In Arachnid, a support ship manages to deliver a much needed Jump Engine to the IMP Cruiser that had been stranded. Both ships make good their escape from the system

Back in Faery, Ground Forces seize Emerald's Nest, leaving just *Iolite's Nest* as the only starbase under DTR control on Elf. However, it is expected to be short-lived as Ground troops report good progress and expect to neutralise defending forces within days.

The hunt now begins for remaining partisan forces and the seizure of supporting outposts, but the Empire Command are confident they have a secure grip on the planet surface.

In orbit the two platforms continue slugging it out. Whilst the DTR platform remains a threat, it seems like it is now only a matter of time before it will be pacified.

In the Quad, the Empire fleet remains in place with the hope of finishing off the remaining 40 DTR ships. However, the DTR manage to withdraw from D12. There are, though, several unconfirmed kills claimed as Empire captains fire on the routed forces.

The Pirate ship *Eyes of Large* is spotted entering the quad, presumably trying to take advantage of the distracted Empire and Detinus forces to hunt around for spoils of war....or to perhaps just try to cause mayhem.

A single DTR Nebulon that had not been listed the previous day does appear on Empire scanners in D12 though, and is

quickly blown up. The ship is suspected to have been on a recon role to monitor the Empire fleet. It is a reminder that whilst the Republic suffered losses at the battle of over 2:1 (roughly 40% of the ships that were involved in the battles at D12), they still have a potent warfleet at their disposal.

212.25.1

After 13 Days of engagements, D12 Faery sees no weapons fire. Whilst crews remain vigilant, for many, it has been the first real sleep they have managed in nearly 3 Galactic Standard Weeks.

On Elf, the remaining DTR base falls – though after heavy fire – the Emperor's Standard is hoisted over what is now not much more than rubble.

Several more freighters are seized, and have Empire standards hastily daubed over the Republic markings.

Whilst the DTR Controlled platform is still to be neutralised, it is now only a matter of time - whether that be surrender, boarding, or being atomised.

Empire Command send forth their congratulations to the forces that have sealed this victory on the Ground and in Space

It is a major fillip to the Empire Navies in particular, which between them had seen a number of reverses at the hands of the Stellar Armada, but it also effectively hands control of the system to the Empire.

It is also further testament to the resolve of Empire Ground Forces, who in spite of seeing many of their comrades fall around them, continued to press their advantage.

Plaudits are also raised for the Logistics units that pulled out all the stops to get the troops on the deck and kept the supplies feeding in, and helped keep the fleet supplies with munitions.

Scouts indicate sightings of ships that were involved in Faery in Badlands and Venice. It is believed a large number of what remains of the Stellar Armada will need extensive repairs and repainting of Go Faster Stripes - but there are a good proportion that are still in good fighting order.

The Empire expects to cross paths with the Stellar Armada again sooner or later, and they know there will be a score to settle

In Badlands, GTT ground forces seize three small outposts

212.25.2

A GTT Cruiser Squadron of 6 ships runs across 4 DTR Stragglers, and a freighter at B13 Faery. The freighter is blown up, whilst the warships attempt to escape.

This marks the last significant combat in the battles for Elf

Empire forces will go on to seize smaller DTR installations across the Faery system in the next few weeks to establish a firm grip on the system. **Hail the Emperor!**

Some Stats...

Biggest Hitter of the Day (damage to a single enemy ship on one day)

24.4 GTT *War Hammer 760* (76027) - Ship Attacking DTR *Liberator* (54358) - 23638 [42600] Damage

24.3 DTR *Liberator-M* (80080) - Ship Attacking IMP *ISP Serpents Reach* (29802) - 22640 [41370] Damage

24.2 DTR *Liberator-M 33* (82826) - Ship Attacking GTT *SG AKG-03 Ivory Tower* (63058) - 21458 [33950] Damage

24.1 DTR *Liberator-M* (80080) - Ship Attacking GTT *War Hammer 192* (19217) - 18368 [33950] Damage

23.5 DTR *Liberator-M 8* (68252) - Ship Attacking GTT *Stalwart Interceptor 2* (55220) - 20956 [29850] Damage

23.4 DTR *Liberator-M 15* (98055) - Ship Attacking CNF *Clone XX* (97942) - 22193 [47475] Damage

...so the GTT *War Hammer 760* sneaks in at the end to take the overall biggest single hit of the battle

The "Takes it on the chin" Award: DTR *Liberator-R* (42620) - Ship - total of 70,309 damage taken without being destroyed (left the field of battle at 64.5% hull damage)

The "Best Impression of a Star" Award: DTR *Liberator-R* (13324) - dished out 14,841 damage and received 104254 in kind. Making it the biggest hotspot of trouble (Total 119,095)

The "Keep Fighting to the last" Award: DTR *Musket S6* (97052) - Integrity Breakdown at 99.4%

The "Apprentices First Day on the Damage Control Job" Award: CIA *Ranger A1* (48720), which broke up at 0.1% Hull Damage

The "Doesn't get the Credit" Credit: IMP *Challenger* (36076) 6 Days combat, 46,700 Damage dealt out, no kills registered

The "Steal Your Thunder" Award: CNF *Self Made* (9947), 13 kills for a total of 25 Damage inflicted

The "We're gonna need a bigger gun"

Award: DTR *Terminator* (15214), out of a potential 13,950 damage it could have inflicted on target ships only 17 damage was actually inflicted (0.2%)

The "My Wings Are like a Shield of Steel" Award:

GTT *Bastion CXI* (54407) – out of a possible 8400 Damage that could have been taken from hits from DTR ships, 0 was inflicted.

The "Fire in the Hole" Award: DTR Pick Me (48359) – 2,454 Damage taken, from a possible 1700 (presumed an Inertial Stabiliser Exploded causing more damage)

The "Ricochet Specialist" Award: CNF King of Spades (45626) – 1,267 Damage caused, from a possible 465 dished out

Battle Stats of the main engagement at D12 Faery

Total Forces used	Capital	Carriers	Heavy Cruisers	Destroyers	Others	Total	Freighters
DTR	557	246	157	85	3	1,048	
Losses	141	91	109	57	3	401	11
	25.3%	37.0%	69.4%	67.1%	100.0%	38.3%	

Empire	965	70	73	21	4	1,133	63
Losses	169	1	4			174	
	17.5%	1.4%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%	15.4%	0.0%

Allied Force: 81 CIA, 427 CNF, 79 FET, 210 GTT, 54 HLQ, 282 IMP

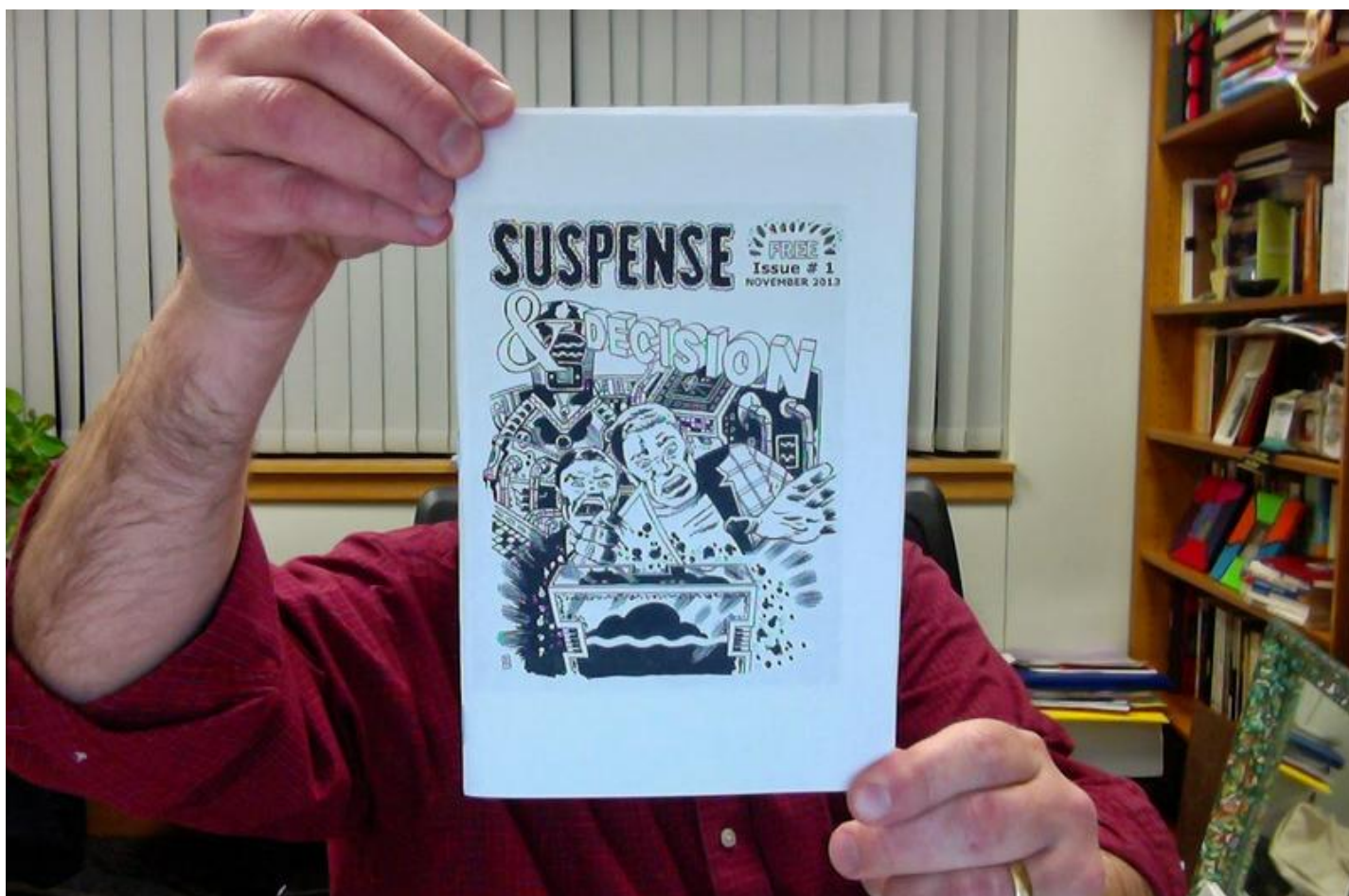
Note these numbers are as per scanned by IMP positions





phoenix

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

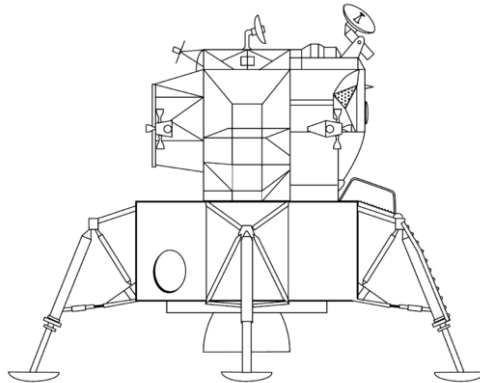


Matthew W. Schmeer has [discovered](#) Suspense & Decision. Have you?

His [Rended Press](#) blog site deals with various & sundry stuffs for old school rpgs.

Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail

Charles Mosteller



DungeonWorld Mailing List

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/DungeonWorld/info>

Hosted by Yahoo! Groups, this discussion group has maintained a frequent and sizable number of postings heading into its 16th straight years, although it has been in existence even longer than that.

While not posted to nearly as frequently as in its heyday, nonetheless, postings to this group occur with a great sense of regularity.

Madhouse owner Steve Tierny [announced](#) on February 28th of this year, in his posting to this discussion group, that he had mulled things over, and he had decided to not raise turn fees for DungeonWorld players, this year - and this year is still young, yet, in case anyone reading this needs a reminder.

One thing about DungeonWorld is that it enjoys a great measure of longevity, and it shows, when you take time out to actually sit down and browse this great and lengthy tome of messages that stretch back across the years. If anything is self-evident, after

visiting and browsing this mailing list, it's that DungeonWorld has long been a stable presence on the gaming scene, enduring when many PBM-type games have failed and fallen by the wayside.

According to the [Madhouse website](#), "You can play DungeonWorld completely for FREE, with a single character, or play commercially with as many characters as you like."

As of the time that I write this here on March 31st, 2014, this group has 137 postings to its credit for the month of March 2014. If I added up all of the postings for the respective months correctly, that brings the grand total to 75,116 postings. If you intend to read them all, then you had better get started, because THAT'S a LOT of reading! More importantly, that's a lot of adventuring. It's more than a dungeon. It's DungeonWorld!

CONCLUSION: This is no mere moon colony. This is the equivalent of a Homeworld, in terms of life of a PBM nature. It's a play by mail paradise, and not only are there signs of fresh PBM life, but of ancient life, uninterrupted.

Stellar Conflict

exploration * colonization * conquest



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Company Commander

Well, Company Commander is, at heart, a war game! It is set in a fictional Third World country in South America, and simulates squad level combat between warring factions from within the country.

Infantry

In this game, you recruit and train your forces, before they can be committed to battle. There is a huge disparity between the three types of infantry within the game, so if the best meets the worst, there won't be much contest. However, infantry are just a small part of the picture.

Command And Control

Company Commander's combat model requires a command and control element to be present, to direct the operations of your combat units. This is a vital component in any battle, and includes field command posts and higher level headquarters, to provide staff and communication support to the officers and commanders who are allocated to the action. Allocating Command elements to attacks allows other types of support, in the form of artillery and air support.

Logistics

Most wargames tend to skip, perhaps, the most important aspect of combat i.e.: getting there with the mostest fastest. Although the provision for differing ammunition types, medical supplies, spares, and food is dealt with by the generic "Combat Supplies," the availability of combat supplies is central to combat. Differing missions demand a varying tempo, and consequently, combat supply use. A probe with a few squads of infantry will use less combat supplies per unit, than an assault with armoured vehicles and artillery support.

Combat Supplies have to be purchased at a border or port, and then transported to the combat zone. For this reason, stockpiles at the start of a campaign followed by a continuous resupply will be needed. Battles can be lost by superior forces, if they should run out of supplies and be obliged to disengage and retreat.

As with many campaigns, the humble truck is the lifeline of the fighting man. They are used to bring men, weapons, and supplies forward, and continue to shuttle forces to where they are needed. Company Commander has two types of truck available, both Russian in origin. One is the ubiquitous ZIL and the other the Ural heavy truck. The ZIL is an old design, and not as reliable as the heavier

and more rugged Ural. You will certainly need mechanics and workshops to keep your feet on the very poor roads in that part of the world.

Armoured Vehicles and Heavy Weapons

There are several types of vehicles in each class of armour, ranging from light armoured cars to a main battle tank. Each has differing supply usage and combat capabilities.

Heavy weapons and artillery can be attached to a force, but they need combat supplies and communication, and include Heavy machine guns, Recoilless Rifles, light to heavy mortars, and howitzers.

Modern forces use a plethora of weapons, such as the RPG-7, AT-3 Anti Tank Missile, Claymore mines, and Bangalore torpedoes, among others. These are available to every force, and can mean the difference in a combat situation.

Aircraft

Aircraft are represented by individual units, ranging from an unarmed recon and spotting aircraft, to modern turbo prop attack aircraft, to transport planes that give the option for parachute operations. Each aircraft has a pylon rating, where you must load each pylon on the aircraft with ordnance tailored to the mission and current availability.

Economy

Your faction is financed by the sale of local natural resources at the border or port. Again, the humble truck is the hero, as these are needed to carry goods from your plantations and fields to the border for sale. Keeping the warehouses at the point of sale full will guarantee a steady flow of cash to your coffers.

Summary

Company Commander is a high-complexity war game made easy to play. Players are called upon to sell goods and purchase weapons from Arms Dealers. These forces need to be deployed in a blend of differing units that will operate together, to be effective in battle. This gives you total control of every aspect of operations, with the objective of becoming the largest faction in the country.

Events are notified on the website, as soon as they happen, so you can keep abreast of the action, as it happens.

If you are a wargamer, then this is the game for you.

www.Jason-Oates-Games.com

jason@jason-oates-games.com

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Where We're Heading...

Houston, all systems are go. We are accelerating, en route to target.

Five issues, and I am twenty-one minutes shy of the publication deadline. It is very doubtful that I will make it, but I try, nonetheless. I've just run out of time, is all. Surely, you'll understand?

At times, down through the years, it has felt as though PBM, itself, had run out of time. That time had passed it by.

Yet, here we are, in a new century, and play by mail gaming is still with us, still entertaining gamers all over the globe, still enduring against all odds.

Didn't there used to be a PBM game by that name?

I continue to ponder the future of this publication. Do we have a future? If so, what does it hold in store for us? What does it hold in store for you, our readership, for that matter?

None of us know. We can guess. We can speculate.

We can hope. We have a better chance of succeeding, no matter what the future brings our way, if you join in participating to make sure that we have the stories and the ads and the artwork to bring each new issue to fruition.

Our assistant editor, Mark Wardell, continues his self-imposed hiatus. Here's hoping that all is well on Mark's end. Bernd, our new assistant editor, is not Mark's replacement. Rather, he's here to supplement our efforts.

Trying to publish this magazine on a monthly basis is proving to be quite a challenge. I can't imagine what it must be like to only publish half as frequently, as some of the old PBM magazines used to do.

But, then again, they couldn't imagine many of the conveniences that we enjoy, here in the modern day and age.

It means a lot to me, personally, to champion such a worthy cause, such

a sterling form of gaming.

Even still, I know that I'm not fooling anyone, and certainly not myself. What this magazine needs, as much as PBM, itself, needs it, is a good infusion of fresh blood.

With Bernd, that's exactly what we - what you all - get. Yet, we still need more. If you are reading this, I hope that you'll consider joining the Suspense & Decision team.

Not an issue goes by that I don't think of David Webber, the long time editor of Paper Mayhem magazine.

With the passage of each issue, I find myself relating more and more to the challenges that David faced every issue. He did a yeoman's job, one that commands a great deal of admiration from me, all these many years later.

My publication deadline is five minutes away. My apologies for having missed it. That's a backwards way to head.

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