INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SUSPENSE & DECISION

Issue # 4

As you prepare to turn the page, and dig into the meat of this issue, I'm hoping that we have included something of interest to you.

One of our goals is to stoke the fires of your imagination. We want you to be more than just readers. We hope for you to be active participants in this quest of ours to keep this magazine - and this hobby - growing and going.

With your help, we've gotten this far. It wasn't all that long ago that the last of the old school PBM magazines, Flagship, had disappeared, like Paper Mayhem before it.

How does it feel to be reading a PBM magazine, again? How does it feel to know that PBM gaming is not only not dead, but on the offensive, once more?

The PBM spirit endures! The PBM fire burns, even still.

Ultima Online

By: Jim Kemeny

When I retired I hoped to continue writing, though my health limited me to writing from home. I decided to try Ultima Online. Lurking on the forums for quite some time was at first very off-putting as this was a period of intense and acrimonious debate among factions of role-players. But once the dust had settled I felt it would be possible for me to start up as a peaceful character, role-playing. There were several alternatives. One was to specialise in a craft skill like carpentry, tailoring, mining or smithing. Other abilities were added later or were boosted into full craft skills, like cooking and fishing. Yet other abilities were not skills in this sense but rather things any character can do or try to do, like begging, theft, lock-picking, disguises, herding and husbandry, and creating permanent in-game books to stock a library.

My choice was made for me by my interest in Swedish history, best captured in a copy of the annual Swedish Tourist Association Yearbook for 1989 *Mostly about Iron* that we had at home. The title is intended to include metals like copper and tin, both used as roofing metals (hence *Mostly* rather than *Only about Iron*). Copper is popular for steeples, as well as cupula (sometimes called onion domes) on churches, as well as using tin on large areas of flat roofed buiildings like supermarkets. There is also a separate chapter on pewter.

But iron is the most abundant metal. So it was used for many decorative purposes in Sweden, even in graveyards - see this website on Ekshärad Church for examples of what I called in UO "fretwork" as th origin of the surname Fretting. Copper roofing can be seen in these images of the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh and Minnepolis

City Hall. More about this increasingly rare and expensive metal can be found on the Wikipedia website for Copper. The history of Copper in Sweden is also in Wikipedia at Great Copper Mountain (Stora Kopparberg) at Falun. Copper had been mined there for well over a thousand years, at least since the Normal conquest of England. The mine was closed in 1992 though experience has shown that when the price of a mineral rises - as is the case today to feed the demand from China and other growth economies - mines can easily be re-opened.

Smithing also gave me the natural choice of culture - Nordic. I gave my smith character Jern as his given name. At around the same time I had become aware of the widespread number of mining and smithing communities in Uppland. Lövstabruk caught my imagination. As Löv in Swedish means Leaf, I chose the name Leafsta as the name of the smithing settlement Jern came from. Even the Walloon name of Lövsta - *Leufsta* - means something similar - *glade, or forest clearing.* Rich high-grade ore deposits, abundant woodland to make charcoal, fast water to provide power for the forges, all made this idyllic settlement a natural choice of name. These decisions were decided as the first part of sub-creating[1] the history and background of the family, most of it before even beginning to design the character, and all based on the blacksmith craft. One of the local trips we like to do is to visit an old rural mill settlement: Mobydalen or Högbo Bruk are the nearest.

---

[1] **On sub-creation see Paul Kocher *Master of Middle Earth*, Penguin, 1972**

I knew already from one of the chapters in *Mostly about Iron* (pp. 60-67) that blacksmiths were feared for their magic, and combining blacksmith with spell-casting was something that I decided against from the start. I wanted an ordinary blacksmith, nothing more.

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

Sub-creating was part of role-playing culture, though as far as I could tell no-one actually called it that. I never got to know any of the UO players outside UO, for the most part not even their names. But they were a cosmopolitan mix. The closest to my own interest in sub-creation was Frans, a Californian who had been writing about the sub-created world in his own guilds. He started three discussion groups on this, one was the name of his guild, *Twilight Fellowship*, the other was *TFwriting* and a third *Oakland*. Jern joined the Serf Guild, run, I think, by a British player whose real name I did not know. I also got to know the leader of the Elf guild, who also ran a tavern, the player being Dutch. One player chose to be a Duke and based at Trinsic. There were several Danes and one Belgian. Also a couple of German players who started the village of Silverleaf, simply by building houses together, later joined by others. You can see an example of their sub-creating work at http://www.village-of-silverleaf.de, one of the oldest extant player villages in UO. Reading the first page, especially beneath the picture of the Yew region gives a good idea of what sub-creation involves in practice.

I have to confess that I was never much good at role-playing: too rigid and loyal to my character's preferred racial background. But I was impressed by all the players I met in-game whose role-playing without exception was outstanding.

If I Was Him

An Encounter with a Space-Faring Cabal of Critics

While taking a self-guided tour through the forum postings over on KJC Games' Phoenix: BSE website, I encountered a discussion of issue # 2 of Suspense & Decision magazine. If your curiosity gets the best of you, then check it out for yourself at:

http://phoenixbse.com/index.php?a=posts&tid=61009

Since it is arguably the best discussion thread about the magazine that I have encountered, to date, one that contains elements of both praise and criticism, I felt it to be worth highlighting and worth sharing with our readership at large.

Praise and compliments are always nice to hear. They're pleasant on the ears. They make you feel good.

But, it's the criticism that serves as the really useful fuel to prompt you to strive in earnest to improve the end product that you are producing, where publishing a magazine is concerned.

Apparently, in issue # 2, an article that I authored did not pass muster with the space-faring cabal that took me to task for losing the point that I was trying to make, expressing myself poorly, and leaving them with not much of a feeling beyond the proverbial "meh," in their mind.

So, in the interest of intergalactic harmony, allow me to take this opportunity to respond to their concerns.

Ando stated, **"I have to say, I wasn't quite sure on that article by Charles Mosteller which was trying to critique Mica's article, I ended up losing the point he was trying to make; the original article was more on the mark then his "reflections and musings" if I was him I wouldn't have bothered!"**

Certainly, I could have simply "not bothered." But, the fact of the matter is that I did want to bother with writing the article. There were, in fact, reasons why I wanted to do so. If I had not bothered, then this cabal of critics may well have not bothered with criticizing my shortcomings as a writer.

And criticizing articles, such as the one in question that I authored, is part and parcel of having a well-rounded discussion-at-large on the subject matter that we cover, here at Suspense & Decision magazine.

Darius Shirazi stated, **"It was funny seeing Mica Goldstone repeated quite so much. I think he might be making the argument the big pbm companies ruined / didn't support the hobby enough. it was all poorly expressed tho and left not much beyond "meh" in my mind."**

Since these readers didn't grasp the "point" that I was trying to make, the odds are pretty decent, I figure, that there are likely other readers who also failed to grasp the "point" that I was striving to underscore.

Of course, in truth, I wasn't trying to make a single point. Rather, there were multiple points that I was attempting to make and to underscore, simultaneously. Reflecting on the musings of PBM personalities struck me as a good way to go about accomplishing just, exactly that.

The article that I was responding to, in the article of my own, was one that I felt had much value. Some of what Mica said, all those many years ago, I agreed with, and other things that he said, I disagree with. But, nonetheless, I felt that his initial article

of some eight years earlier contained much good food for thought.

And, not just food for thought - but, food for discussion, as well.

As the author of a magazine that I have dubbed, "A PBM Magazine for the 21st Century," I have a vested interest in generating discussion of play-by-mail and turn-based gaming. In order to successfully accomplish that objective requires food for thought.

I made a point of "repeating" Mica Goldstone as much as I did, in that issue, for the very reason that, thus far, Mica has proven himself to be one of the commercial PBM company owners who rank at or near the top of Old Guard PBM company personalities that have made an active and meaningful effort to participate in helping to make Suspense & Decision magazine a reality.

Of course, it wasn't just the dated musings of Mica Goldstone that I reflected on, in that particular article. I also reflected upon some of Rick Loomis' musings from years past. Likewise, it's no coincidence that the first article in the new Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail series of articles for this magazine focused upon a forum dedicated to discussing games run by Rick's company, Flying Buffalo, Inc., or that the front cover of issue # 2 featured Santa's sleigh being pulled by, not a team of reindeer, but a buffalo, of all things. It was a nod to Rick Loomis ushering in the era of commercial play-by-mail gaming.

The "point" of such instances is to give more "air time" within the pages of the magazine to those that actively participate in helping this magazine to try and "gather interest and to grow it," as I articulated was our magazine's purpose in a different article in the same issue # 2, the "Where We're Headed" article.

Granted, game companies and game moderators might well prefer compliments to criticism, but from my perspective, either can be equally useful in serving as food for thought.

The "point" of the magazine is not to simply showcase this particular game or that one, and neither is it to parrot the views of established PBM personalities, whether current or dated. And, because we must start somewhere, we must start somewhere.

The article that I wrote, with which this cabal of space-faring critics took issue, sparked not just their criticism that decorates the Phoenix: BSE forum - it also sparked a new article from Mica Goldstone, in response.

And that response appeared within the pages of issue # 3, for the pleasure of our reading audience - which includes these very same critics who think so highly of Mica and his game, Phoenix: BSE.

My point was not that I felt that the big PBM companies ruined or didn't support the hobby, per se. Rather, my point was that the big PBM companies, this Old Guard that I often make reference to, tend to display a notable lack of understanding of the core nature of the very genre of gaming that they, themselves, played a primary role in bringing into existence.

My point is that at least some of what Mica Goldstone said, all those many years ago, is well worth reviewing - and calling into question - today. Why? Because, there's a very good chance, I feel, for the PBM industry and its turn-based gaming ancestral descendants to actually benefit from exploring, anew, the deficiencies and shortcomings of the arguing points that Mica, at least once upon a time ago, believed enough to articulate them in an article for Flagship magazine.

My point is that much hypocrisy inheres in Mica Goldstone's characterization of, "Once

upon a time, the gamer accepted his fate," when PBM companies and game moderators have been no less visibly accepting of their fate, as technology and change have negatively impacted their game offerings.

My point is that I will press them on the points that they, themselves, have made over the years, regarding their own hobby, regarding their own industry.

My point is that, as many times as not, those who run commercial PBM companies have been wrong about what gamers wanted. Not only have they been wrong - and quite often, but of even greater import in the here and now, they REMAIN wrong, even now.

My point is that innovation - true, honest-to-God innovation - is lacking in the PBM industry. Where are the new PBM games? Where are the PBM games geared primarily toward the youth of today - the very same youth who form the future of tomorrow's play-by-mail gaming? My point is that, in many ways, the PBM landscape is a barren, desolate wasteland. I question how such a wasteland can ever be expected - realistically expected - to attract gamers in serious numbers?

My point is that a very robust and healthy spirit of competition burned within the hearts of PBM companies and moderators, during the heyday now past of play-by-mail gaming - and that nothing even remotely approaching it occupies their hearts, today. My point is that they have retreated to their proverbial bunkers, and in the process of doing so, they have left the field to their competition - competition of a scope and of a scale that extends well beyond just other forms and genres of gaming. Their true competition extends to entertainment of many different forms and types. The things that vie for potential gamers' entertainment dollars are many and varied, these days. My point is that outmoded ways of looking at things will not serve the hobby or the industry well.

My point is that the PBM industry needs to reinvent itself - and that one way to help it to achieve that goal is by taking a long, hard, and honest look at the many factors that play a role in blunting the industry's chances of recapturing some of its glory days of yesteryear.

My point is that the postal genre of gaming didn't so much die, as it was largely abandoned - and leading that charge out of the gate was none other than the Old Guard PBM companies, themselves.

In doing so, they helped to hollow out their own player bases. In doing so, they emasculated their hobby, they all but killed their industry.

My point of juxtaposing Mark Wardell's e-mail about the Origins PBM Awards against Mica Goldstone's old article presented in the same issue was to underscore that I think that Mica was right on the money when he said, all those many years ago, "We generally find the whole thing a bit of a joke," where he referred to PBM awards.

Typically, when I write an article about something, there's almost always more than just a single point that I am trying to make. Furthermore, I also don't tend to be a stranger to taking the long, scenic route to making such points. If I were aiming for brevity, then I wouldn't have bothered with creating a magazine.

Tarquin al-Schmidt said, **"I did appreciate that the guy kept making the point that Mica had written about a decade earlier. Me, I would've given Mica the opportunity to submit an update before writing my rebuttal, but what do I know?"**

The article of Mica Goldstone's from almost a decade ago that I asked Mica for permission, back on November 30th, 2013, to reprint in issue # 2 of Suspense & Decision, I explained to Mica in a follow on e-mail on

that very same day, and I quote, "I want to write an article that refers to this particular article, for the next issue."

So, while my critics may well have done things differently, the fact remains undisturbed that I only have the benefit of their hindsight after the fact, rather than beforehand.

Admittedly, I chart a different course with Suspense & Decision magazine than many others would chart, if they were in my shoes. But, it is a conscious decision, to be certain.

That said, I invite my cabal of critics to submit articles to future issues of Suspense & Decision, that the quality of our publication may improve, going forward.

In the meantime, I will be making my point that I wish to make, not over the span of a single article, but rather, over the span of the magazine's lifetime, however long or short that such proves to be.

Personally, I prefer a long discussion on the subjects of play-by-mail and turn-based gaming, rather than a short discussion. And in order to facilitate such, I can and will resort to taking the long, scenic route to a type of gaming that I believe remains the best yet conceived by the human mind.

In all likelihood, issue # 2 likely won't mark the last time that I make my point so poorly.

Suspense & Decision magazine could certainly use some competent staff writers. To my cabal of space-faring critics, I extend an open invitation to demonstrate first-hand how they would craft better articles on the subject matter that our magazine covers.

It lacks the glint and the glory of running a space empire, I'm certain, but I will be more than happy to provide them plenty of space of a different sort - space on the pages and in the columns of future issues of this magazine. If need be, I can always forego

printing one of my own poorly written articles in favor of one of their articles.

Darius Shirazi said, **"Look forward to less hobby naval gazing in future issues and more articles about games in the now."**

Personally, I look forward to more articles about "games in the now," also - although, to be quite honest about it, the "naval gazing" will likely continue. One man's junk is another man's treasure. One gamer's naval gazing is another gamer's article worth reading.

If the naval gazing was to cease, then in all likelihood, so would the entire magazine. Suspense & Decision would disappear.

In pursuit of attempting to grow the hobby and industry, I don't enjoy the luxury of not delving into PBM's past, its structure, or the thoughts and mindsets of those that constitute the driving force that has brought PBM gaming to where it is, today.

Play by mail gaming has a history that is rich and colorful, and fortunately for myself and this magazine, it is also a history that spans entire decades. Thus, I suspect that it is quite rich in food for thought.

Thus, why wouldn't I mine it? Why shouldn't I mine it? I dare say that there are fans of the genre that would want me to do just, exactly that.

To my cabal of critics, I salute you! You do the magazine a good and worthwhile service by offering your criticisms into the Internet ether.

In the old glory days of play by mail, there were many cabals, many critics. To mine for gold is to sift through much dirt. Thus, through many words will this magazine sift, to undercover the true gemstones, the true diamonds of importance.

Are there any who will join me in the mine?

Galaxy-Wide Recruiting Drive

[Phoenix: BSE](#) is run by KJC Games

Explore. Conquer. Dominate.

The Flagritz Empire is entering a new era, following the truce with long standing enemies, the Felini Tyranny. Supported by hive allies and new-found comrades in arms, the Empire has reached out its tentacles to grasp new territories in both old and new space. A new era has dawned, in which the galactic map is being made anew, where human governments are halted in their expansion, and driven back into traditional regions of space.

*Explore all areas of space. **Nowhere is forbidden to the explorator fleets** of the Fessin Caste.*

Conquer those who would seek to halt, or otherwise challenge, the Empire of the Race.

Dominate those who have fallen beneath the Empire's advance.

*The Flagritz are **the most unique alien form in the galaxy**, a true alien in all senses. Physically, they are tentacles, mucous, armoured carapaces and multiple eyes. Psychologically, **they are as gods**, viewing all other life as expendable, or useful only insomuch as it can advance or assist the Empire's endeavours. Socially, they are split into three Castes - one promoting expansion, one war, and one isolation.*

The Flagritz are not a 'nice' race, by our standards - but, they are not evil. They are simply Flagritz.

Join the Empire of the Race, and release yourself from your daily inhibitions.

- Silith Ungol -
Fessin Caste Leader
Party for Peaceful Integration

Phoenix News Flash!

By: Gath-Edhoras

Phoenix is a play by mail game of huge scale. Rather than go into technical details, I thought it might be useful to provide generalized introductions on various aspects of the game. Today, I want to cover the rise of the Alien Affiliations.

Though present throughout the history of the game, the Alien affiliations (an affiliation is a grouping of like-minded players that forms a clan-type structure in-game) have rarely had much opportunity to impact the almost universal dominance of humanity - except when allied to some of the in-fighting human factions. This changed, recently, in-game.

It all started with some minor tit-for-tat engagements in the shiny, new Corewards periphery of space (the game splits regions of space into peripheries that contain a number of star systems). The big human war (between the DTR and the Imperial/Confederate alliance) was showing signs of bogging down, and two factions of the Confederacy - the CNF (militaristic anti-alien humans) and the BHD (think the film 'Priest' or the Spanish Inquisition in space) were engaged in what could be termed commerce raiding versus one of the alien affiliations, the Flagritz (think Tentacles, Call of Cuthulu-type master race beings). The DEN (Telepathic wolves, though structurally, think of bad tempered Viking Eldar or Protoss) joined in attacking a BHD starbase and ships with their own forces, soon assisted by a further alien affiliation, the Falconians (bird-like race)

At this stage, things were still low key, with small fleets of 20-30 ships operating - until the Confederacy decided to up the ante, and pushed Corewards several 200-300 strong formations. The other affiliations pumped more ships in, with the Flagritz being the primary force, supported by the FCN, then the DEN, in terms of forces engaged. Engagements, rather unsurprisingly, died down slightly, as these large forces started gingerly dancing around with each other, looking for an advantage before attacking. So, lots of hit and runs occurred, but very little standing fights. If anything, the Confederacy had the better of this stage, in terms of ships destroyed. If things had stopped here, the Confederacy could be well satisfied with its actions. It had pre-empted an alien challenge to its power, and militarily, managed to counter the forces of the aliens, without impacting their bigger war versus the DTR (a human affiliation - think Battlestar Galactica type political democratic organisation)

In this game, though, it is usually what you cannot or don't expect that bites you in the arse, and in this case, the DEN initiated a new power gambit. The DEN forces Corewards were small (30 ships or so), but in the meantime, the main DEN battle fleet was moved to a different Periphery (the Cluster), and with the strong support of no less than four other alien affiliations, launched a major attack on the Confederacy's control of the area. Their primary target was the stargate, which permitted access to the Periphery. Control

the stargate, and you control the Cluster. Soon, a massive battle involving the CNF and BHD on one side, and the DEN, FLZ, FCN and HEX (a hive race - think Tyranids or Zerg) on the other. The Confederacy started strong, using their stock of WOMD (anti-matter missiles), but could not re-supply or repair that easily. Eventually, the aliens won out, and the Confederates were beaten - not helped by the fact that a human affiliation, the DTR (who are at war with the Confederacy), launched their own attack at the other side of the star gate, preventing Confederate forces from easily escaping.

The Confederacy, thus, retired to lick their wounds, and seem a shadow of their former selves - though some of their sub factions (BHD, CIA) seem less affected. Their power base in the Cluster has been almost destroyed, and more alarmingly, the alien affiliations' ability to put aside their own differences and work in concert has been proved to the other power bases in-game. This was not all plain sailing, as during the big battle at one point, HEX,FCN,DEN and FLZ ships were destroying each other, rather than focusing on the enemy.

In game terms, the humans finally have a united alien power block that could threaten human dominance of the Universe (or, at least, be a major player). No doubt, the Confederacy is planning its own revenge, and the aliens are deciding on their next steps.

Game Structure

Affiliations: These can comprise any number of players, and an affiliation's ability to adapt to the game is often related to how many active players it can put in play. Most of the alien affiliations consist of two to around five players, whereas most of the big human affiliations have a lot more.

Corewards: The initial Corewards actions were carried out by three alien players from different affiliations working in concert, versus five to six Confederate players. When the action shifted to the Cluster, several more alien players joined in. This is possible, as the game does not lock its resources to any single player, and anyone joining the game can often get a useful military force to join in such actions very quickly. This does depend on affiliation joined, and the structure and aims of that affiliation. All the alien affiliations are resource heavy, and have plenty to give new players, as they would all like to expand faster. This is sometimes less easy in some of the larger human affiliations, due to the their need to control resources in often one or two key players hands.

Mechanics: Like most things, the more you need to do, the more it costs, but in Phoenix's case, it is very easy to get heavily involved in-game with little outlay. It is possible to play for free, with a small force of ships, if a person so wishes. But, the next step up from free play (controlling a political) costs around £2 a week, and allows a potentially huge amount of forces to be controlled, with no increase in expense.

Postscript

This little article has covered one in-game event that took around a year to resolve, and is currently ongoing. I may delve into the threat of the player pirates, next time, along with the steps being taken to counter that particular menace.

The Galactic Trade and Transport corporation wants you!

The **GTT** is **the periphery's premier chartered corporation** and we are searching for new members. While other affiliations are looking for employees, we are **seeking partners**. Members who will help plan for the future and carry out the tasks that advance those plans. We are **one of the oldest, continuously operating affiliations** in the Phoenix universe with a strong core group of members. Our primary mission is **planetary development and interstellar trade**. The GTT has openings for Fleet Managers and Starbase Governors. We maintain a **state-of-the-art battle fleet** for those with more adventurous spirits. All skill levels are welcome and we pride ourselves on being newbie friendly. Those who wish to play the free game only are invited to check us out as well. The **GTT** - *it's more than just a game!* For more information, contact: [James Stryker](), **CEO of the GTT**

Hyborian War Kingdom Spotlight

Kingdom of Nemedia (Part 2)

By: J.D.

Now, on to the military...

THE NEMEDIAN MILITARY

Diverse as it is deadly. True enough, as Hyborian troops go. The Nemedian military is composed of heavy troop types and one light archer type. You have the standard, run of the mill HI and HC, as well as some above average HI and HC. I'll talk a little bit about each of them now.

Nemedian Knights: Your standard heavy cavalry. They fight just as good as anything around you, they're fast and you can have 40% of them in your armies. Keep them maxed out or close to it and in your IAs.

> **NOTE:** This continues from Part 1 of the Kingdom Spotlight on Nemedia authored by J.D., which was featured in our last issue.

Royal Cavalry Guard: One of your two elite units. Will go toe to toe with anything that any kingdom can offer, even the legendary Black Dragons of Aquilonia. You can only have one of them at a time, though. Still, keep it in your Imperial Army that will be seeing action and be sure to raise a new troop of them immediately after they're destroyed in battle. They have a bonus in fortified terrain as an extra perk.

The Adventurers: These guys are tough. They won't really fight much better than your Nemedian Knights, but what I've found is that they will route less due to their excellent morale, which means that they'll stay on the field longer and kill more of the enemy. That's a good thing. Keep them maxed out at 10% and in your Imperial Army(s) that will be seeing the most action.

I generally try to keep them all in the same army, rather than spreading them out here and there in the beginning. Later in the game, as your troop base grows, you can spread them out a little.

Nemedian Foot: Your standard heavy infantry. Can't say much good or bad about these guys. They'll go one for one with most other troops, save for the above average such as Old Warriors, Poitanian Knights, Brythunian Noble Cavalry...etc. You'll levy these like mad. Put some in your Imperial Armies as filler and leave the rest in your PAs.

Nemedian Archers: Great troops, if you're fighting a bail of straw. As with all LIA, they suck beyond belief. What's worse is that you are forced to keep a minimum % around the house at all times. Let the computer raise them for you as needed and tuck them away safely in a provincial army that will never see battle. Some people say that they're good to raid with, but I disagree, as they will just be taking away from the more important heavy troops that you could be raising instead.

Royal Guard: Your other elite unit. Like your Royal Cavalry Guard, they will give a better than most performance in battle and stand up against anything. Keep it in the Imperial Army that will see the action and keep raising it each turn after it's destroyed. I usually keep it in the same army that the Royal Cavalry Guard is in.

Adventurers Foot: Like your Adventurers, where routing is concerned. They'll stay and fight to the death, making them twice as lethal. They're on par with any other infantry unit in the game, save for the Old Warriors of Cimmeria and Reavers of Asgard. Keep 'em maxed at 10% and keep 'em in the Imperial Army that'll see the most action.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Your victory conditions lie to the north in the Border Kingdom, in the form of anti-victory progress should he lose any provinces. Also, just for good measure, you are additionally assigned to take the Central Provinces of Aquilonia and Shadizar of Zamora, plus maintain control of Belverus and Numalia. No small task, to be sure. In fact, and in my humble opinion, you are faced with the toughest set of victory conditions of all the kingdoms in the game. Should you wish to pursue victory in the form of RSI rankings, you'll need to go straight for Shadizar and Central Provinces early, and make damn sure that Border Kingdom never, ever, loses a single province. Even IF you manage to achieve these goals, you'll need to knock off other kingdoms in the top 10 if you ever want to see the win. Ironically enough, if Border Kingdom is doing well, it'll be hard to pass him in the rankings. Cool, huh? I hope you like a challenge, because they don't get any better than this.

IMPERIAL GOALS

Your Imperial Goals consist of Tarantia of Aquilonia, the Nemedian Marches of Brythunia and maintaining control of Hanumar. Your reward for accomplishing this will be an additional Imperial Army and 10 new unique and elite troops. Well, the heavy cavalry is elite, anyway, being of adequate missile, superior melee and superior morale. The medium infantry archer doesn't stack up quite as well with it's good missile, good melee and excellent morale. If you achieve this, keep the cavalry in an active Imperial Army at all times and make sure you always

have the maximum of 5 of them around each turn. Combined with your other elite units of Royal Cavalry Guard and Royal Guard, that's nearly 1/4 of a full Imperial Army of elite troops. Fill in the rest with your Adventurers and Adventurers Foot, and you have one heck of an army at your disposal.

THE NEMEDIAN TREASURY

You have some very wealthy provinces, as well as some very wealthy provinces ripe for the taking to your west and south. The treasury will last you around 5-6 turns from the start of the game, given that you use it wisely. After the first real set of peace years, it will go even further... and that's if you haven't expanded. Get a few of those rich Ophirean provinces under your belt, or maybe some Corinthian, Aquilonian or Kothian provinces, and you will have the funds to weave war for a dozen seasons without running dry if you use your head and play smart. Gold is not something you'll be lacking when you play Nemedia.

And now, on to some strategy and the like...

FRIENDS AND FOES

Your habitual foe, as the kingdom description notes, is Aquilonia. Well, that's one opinion anyway.

Friends

Border Kingdom Your one and only true friend in the north is your ally and little buddy, the Border Kingdom. You don't have to protect him, but it is certainly in your best interests in the long run. Why? Because his provinces make for a great buffer zone against your common foes in Hyperborea and Cimmeria, that's why. Even if you decide to ignore your obligation of defending BK, you'll still end up fighting whoever runs over him. It will only be a matter of time, as he is pretty much helpless without the protection

of Nemedia. It makes perfect sense to ally with him, especially if played by a veteran of the game. You will have his provinces, his armies, his magic and his diplomats protecting your northern border, and that ain't such a bad deal right there. Of course, it doesn't come free. You'll have to spend a considerable amount of resources holding back the likes of Barbarians and the Undead, and possibly even Aquilonians. If he can secure peace treaties in the opening turns, then you can both focus your attention where ever you desire. From there, there are unlimited options at your disposal and you are already a step ahead of Cimmeria and Hyperborea. By helping Border Kingdom to grow, you are also helping yourself. The stronger Border Kingdom gets, the stronger you get, and more options will become available as the game goes on. Limiting your relationship with Border Kingdom to one of strictly defense is unwise. It is a drain on resources and accomplishes next to nothing. Find a way to go on the offensive with Border Kingdom and you'll be killing two birds with one stone as the two of you crush your enemies and strengthen his kingdom.

Brythunia

To your east lies Brythunia, who can be a great ally, and situated right where you need one, too. With his position on the borders of both Zamora and Hyperborea, he can be a valuable asset in logistics alone, not to mention that with time and growth he can become a powerful force to be reckoned with. However, Brythunia is also an easy target right out of the gate. One diplomat that can easily be silenced and 5 potential enemies render her a sitting duck for early attack and easy expansion. In 2 out of the 3 games I played with Nemedia, I tore into Brythunia in the very beginning with both armies and took no less than 5 provinces. Be

that as it may, if you can get Border Kingdom to agree with you, make an ally out of Brythunia if possible.

The rest of the kingdoms that you border need something from you, like provinces. Any of them would make a powerful ally but it isn't a game of how many allies you can make, now is it?

Foes

Where to begin....

Aquilonia

Your habitual foe? Not exactly. While Aquilona has, easily, the best military in the game, it is also in no position to impose it upon you any time soon. Usually up to it's ears in trouble, and lacking in diplomacy a few turns in, Aquilonia is not the threat that you might think. However... if and when you go to battle with her, your troops don't stack up quite as well. I believe that there is a hidden code in the HW program that gives a bonus to certain kingdoms when fighting other kingdoms, such as Aqui/Neme, giving one an advantage. In this case the advantage goes to Aquilonia. Perhaps it's just my luck, but in each game where I've fought Aquilonia, I always come out on the losing end of the kill ratio. In the game I won as Aquilonia, I always came out ahead of Nemedia in the kill ratios. So, my point is, prepare for a grim fight if you do battle with her. That said, if you're going to go after Aquilonia, do it sooner than later, and go in with both guns blazing. Make nice with other kingdoms surrounding her, even if it is only temporary. Work to take out that star diplomat, Valkia Terentius. Bastius Tarascus, your agent, should be able to do it. If you want to hire out then look to Vanaheim, Zamora, Corinthia or even Cimmeria. Taking her out is a must if you want to fight,

though. When invading, use overwhelming force. Go into Tarantia with 2 full armies or more and then branch out from there after crushing the troop base. Just be sure that you aren't the only kingdom invading, as Aquilonia can easily fend you off if you come alone. Let Cimmeria and/or Pictland hit Aquilonia first, and then come in while she is distracted, if possible. There is always the option of allying with Aquilonia, too, but it is seriously frowned upon by the rest of the world and will make the two of you the target of every kingdom in the northwest. Aquilonia's court only gets better with time, too, so keep that in mind if you decide to wait until later in the game to invade. Whatever you do, keep Aquilonia in check by any means necessary.

Corinthia

Another one of those kingdoms with a great military, Corinthia is probably your greatest threat if hostile, due to its military, location and potential allies. The pikemen are renowned worldwide for their tenacity and efficiency in battle. Yet, fear not, for your troops match up surprisingly well... even your knights. The one thing that Corinthia has going for it is the terrain. STAY OUT OF MOUNTAIN TERRAIN. You'll get eaten alive there if you happen to send cavalry, and your infantry will be lucky to keep the odds at 1.5:1. I like to send in an army of Nemedian Foot and Adventurers Foot, with plenty of leadership on the side. Don't be intimidated by Corinthia's reputation, because you are every bit as good militarily. The thing you need to worry about and keep an eye on is who Corinthia chooses as her allies. A Zamoran or Ophirean army moving through her provinces can ruin your day if they catch you sleeping, so beware. Corinthia can also make for a great ally, though. Should the two of you decide to ally,

nothing can stand in your way. However, that decision lies with Corinthia and the goals of her king.

Ophir

Ophir isn't likely to pursue it's Imperial ambitions in most games since it has, arguably, the toughest ones to take. Still, don't take her too lightly. Militarily Ophir just doesn't stack up well against Nemedia, but with the possibility of an alliance with Corinthia or Aquilonia, she can be a real pain. If you go in on the offensive against Ophir, expect to hit FA terrain in Ianthe almost every time, and for the battle to time out with little progress as far as wearing down the troop base. Go around Ianthe, if possible, and shoot for open field battle where you'll make short work of them and their Achilles' heel, that being their medium infantry and light archers. Just be sure to take out the wizard, Redmin Zarus, who has a devastating firewall spell in the abundant open terrain. You'll find Ophir's wealth a nice reward for your troubles once you get a few of her provinces under your belt. On the other hand, as an ally Ophir can make for a nice gate into the rich provinces of Koth, and for a adequate sidekick against a hostile Corinthia or Aquilonia. At any rate, you should be calling the shots here. Why? Because you can.

Zamora

While Zamora needs nothing from you, you need something from her. Like Shadizar. No small task, Shadizar lies safely behind Corinthia. The only other way to it is through alliance with Corinthia or Brythunia, or Ophir and Koth. The problem here is two fold. If you make too many allies, there will be no room for expansion later in the game. If you decide to fight your way through Corinthia,

then it will push that player into alliance with Zamora, which will leave you with your hands more than full. Go through Brythunian allied territory and you have to take Yezud first, not to mention that that course of action may push Turan into alliance with Zamora. Plus, Zamora can put a real hurtin' on your court in a short amount of time; something you can't afford. Zamora is more powerful than you'd think, especially later on if she can get a few provinces under her belt and enough treasury to keep the armies stocked with mercs to compliment the great heavy cavalry. But, once you get into the soft underbelly of the Zamoran home provinces and medium infantry, you'll have smooth sailing from there since Zamora will be forced to raise more medium infantry due to it's percentage maintenance of 25% to 45%. This is the key to fighting Zamora. Be sure to be the guy on the offensive and get at that medium infantry crutch like a hound dog in a rabbit hole. Just double your protection duty, or triple it, and keep a few diplomats on the move at all times. Of course, like any other kingdom, you can always ally with Zamora, which would make a very powerful and deadly alliance against the other kingdoms of the northwest. If you're not playing to win via victory conditions, seriously consider either making a friend at the least of Zamora, or better yet an ally if possible. If you make alliance early, throw the idea of alliance with Brythunia to the wolves and go in for the easy pickings.

Hyperborea

This kingdom is one that you'll probably come to loathe. Time and again, Hyperborea will come for Border Kingdom provinces and be that pest that you just can't get rid of without smashing it into the ground. The problem with that, though, is that Hyperborea's diplomacy is both effective and abundant throughout the game, leaving you frustrated and usually playing a defensive role in Virunian. Militarily, they don't even begin to stack up to your troops, especially in open field where you will slaughter them by the dozen. Set piece is more to their advantage with the magic available to them, not to mention your kill ratios will be considerably less one sided, usually coming out to 2:1, maybe 3:1 at best in your favor. One weakness that Hyperborea has and that you should look to exploit early is her lack of characters who can protect the court. Get after those diplomats and pave the way for an offensive campaign that will leave Hyperborea in ruin. Keep in mind, though, that Hyperborea and Turan are natural allies. Also, Hyrkania allies with Hyperborea more often than not. Keep the spy networks up and running and a keen eye on the situation there after the first peace years.

Cimmeria

It really depends which way Cimmeria wants to go. You may find that all he wants is the large provinces of Aquilonia and peace with Border Kingdom and Nemedia, or you may have a true barbarian on your hands who wants to plunder everything around, especially large kingdoms, and obtain Imperial status to boot. But, being a barbarian kingdom, Cimmeria will still be a threat later in the game when the ice age comes around unless you work out a deal otherwise in player to player diplomacy. Should Cimmeria be hostile, convince Border Kingdom to slap a treaty on him immediately. You can almost always gauge a kingdoms intention by their communication with you, or lack of. Cimmeria is no exception. It would be wise to take the fight to Cimmeria if he is not friendly, as the barbarian kingdoms need time to build up forces and a treasury large enough to supply

their armies. The nice thing about that is, they will only raise 6-8 troops a turn without a treasury, while you will raise twice that with a treasury, which you'll have. Thus, a war of attrition is in your best interests. It would make sense to make an enemy out of Cimmeria for a few reasons. First and foremost, his provinces are right on Border Kingdom's front step. Cimmeria is the perfect kingdom for expansion, where Border Kingdom is concerned. Provinces that can be directly attached to the homeland, and wealthy ones at that. Perfect. Second, once Cimmeria is beat up a little bit and his troop base is dwindled down, he is a sitting duck. It would be a perfect set up if Cimmeria invaded Aquilonia with both armies in Northern Bossonia, leaving him crippled and ill-prepared for a Nemedian and Border Kingdom army, or two, to come sweeping in and taking province after province. Of course, things don't always work out just like you want them to, but you get the idea. Plenty of opportunity on the Cimmerian front. Militarily, you'll be pretty even with a slight edge in most terrain going to Cimmeria and a noticeable edge in hill terrain against your infantry. Don't send your infantry, m'kay? Load your armies up with heavy cavalry and shoot for hill terrain and set piece battle, should you be fighting a few full armies. If not, then go for the open field if you have the larger force. 2 to 1 odds should be plenty to win open field against Cimmeria. (keeping in mind the 75% loss acceptance the barbarian kingdoms naturally have in open field). Your heavy cavalry fights well enough in hill terrain to off-set his advantage there. Your Adventurers should get you nearly even odds. If you go to work on his diplomacy, try to hire out. His heroes are handy with the steel and make some of the finest protectors in the game. Also, make sure your intelligence is updated and you

know who his allies are. Last thing you need is a Vanir or Aesir army marching in to defend, or worse yet into Lowland Fiefs. Be prepared to sunder those alliances ASAP. On the flip side of the coin, if you want to make an ally out of Cimmeria, it can be a lucrative deal for both parties. You have automatic help against Aquilonia and Hyperborea, as well as a secure northern border for Border Kingdom. Plus, a big surprise for anyone on your southern border that isn't suspecting a barbarian invasion early in the game. However, I'd recommend against it, as you stand to gain much more going against him, and in my opinion, the going won't be all that tough if you do it right and use every possible scenario to your advantage, and your resources to their fullest potential.

Conclusion to Friends/Foes

As you can see, the list of friends is short, while the list of potential enemies is rather long, and that's without even getting into kingdoms that you don't border. There are no real natural allies for Nemedia, other than Border Kingdom. However, as the game progresses, keep an eye on what is going on and some lucrative opportunities will arise for you, whether they be mutual goals through campaign or wounded kingdoms ripe for the plucking. There is no rule set in stone about which way to take Nemedia. Make your own way. Any of the above kingdoms I've listed as enemies can also be great allies, and many times the situation will dictate as the game unfolds that you'll wind up friendly with any number of them, as each of you struggle to accomplish your goals and use one another to achieve the best advantage possible. Whatever you do, make sure that the number of friends, as well as enemies, is manageable. Meaning, too many friends is just as bad as too many enemies, if not worse. As Nemedia,

expansion is your key to true dominance. The sooner the better, too.

Now, on to your greatest asset...

THE PROVINCES OF NEMEDIA

This is where it gets good. I mean really good. Nemedia's greatest strength, in my opinion, lies in her wealthy and levy heavy provinces. When people think of a kingdom that levies like mad, they tend to think of Pictland. Well, they should be thinking about Nemedia. It isn't uncommon to levy 8-12 troops per province over a peace years, and on a rare occasion even more. You have the monarch and provincial rulers to really get the most out of your levies when you actively rule. Numalia and Hanumar will be your biggest producers, with the Heartlands coming in at a close second most times. They levy Nemedian Foot, primarily, which is also a blessing because it naturally brings the percentage of them up and drops that of your heavy cavalry and Adventurer types, which is great. With your provincial armies stocked with Nemedian Foot, you can wage war with your best units, exclusively, and not have to worry about raising that infantry to keep the percentages up.

How to get the most out of your levies

After the first real peace years, you'll find your provincial armies well stocked, usually with anywhere between 18-20 troops each. After the second peace years, if you manage to keep the enemies at bay with your diplomacy, which you should be able to do easily, your provincial armies will be sitting at the maximum capacity, or damn close to it, of 30 troops. This is where you will want to conscript so you have room for the next round of levies when the peace years roll around again. Put your conscripted troops on your border provinces that you should have

by now in any number of places, or even in depleted Imperial Armies if necessary. If your provincials border a kingdom you plan to attack, like Corinthia, you are also in a great position to follow up on a failed invasion with another full army from the provincials, led by an Imperial Army of 8 troops, thus taking 22 troops out of the province for direct duty on the battlefield without having to risk losing some to conscription. When you do conscript, though, be sure to actively rule both the province and the kingdom. Even if you have to assign a character with little or no rulership qualities, make sure you have someone ruling each and every home province. You should be pleasantly surprised with a very high rate of success, which I'd say is 90% or better of the troops obeying your conscription command. Also, do not attempt to conscript from every province on the same turn. Very bad idea, as it seems to me that the more provinces that you try to conscript from, the less favorably your people will react to it. Conscript from 2 provinces at a time. Of course, you don't have to wait until the second set of peace years. You can always conscript when you need the troops or as the situation dictates.

GENERAL STRATEGY

First and foremost you are going to need some extra Imperial Armies to put all those troops into. Early expansion is a must for Nemedia in order to project your power where it is needed most, with that being on an offensive and possibly defensive front at the same time. You'll also want to make some room, somewhere, for Border Kingdom to expand. This is tricky and largely dependent on how the Border Kingdom fares diplomatically on the first few turns. You'll want to convince him to peace off all of his potential enemies immediately, even if it

OLYMPIA
G4

What is Olympia exactly?

- a pbem (Play By EMail), so you only need email

- a highly addictive social game

- a turn based strategy game set in a fantasy magical world

- a multiplayer game (50 - 200+ players)

How does it compare other similar games?

- it's open ended with no real victory conditions beyond what you set yourself.

- no solo win, game long alliances are the norm

- no hex map

- complex but therefore interesting timing system (movement and battles)

- the diplomacy is usually at alliance level

- 30 days of possibilities, no long or short turn orders, making outcome of the orders less predictable

- you have less units. 10-18 nobles with 1 key noble

- no races but lots of beasts

- the resource harvesting is pretty basic (nothing dynamic) - you can choose what you do: explore, produce, manage your holdings, build your empire, diplomacy, coordinate with allies, trade, mercenary, mage for hire, thief or just conquer.

What's so special about Olympia then?

 - as you have less units and you invest more in them on a long term

 - one person's units can be very effective.

 - you get attached to your nobles because they are characters!

 - it permits more flavour and role-play

 - less micromanagement because you don't have to manage 100-1000 units

 - the timing is complex but it adds more tactical decisions in 1 turn, and that's what strategy games are about

 - you have a lot of variety in magic, you are free to choose your schools which can stack

 - the same applies to skills, a lot of variety and it all can stack

 - this means you don't have to specialize your faction

 - the map is very interesting, you have the surface world with locations and (hidden) sub locations as well as Hades, faery, the tunnels and the cloudlands

* It's open ended after all, so everyone will find their fun in this game.

* If you want to join, send an email to tom.droeshout@gmail.com, so we can add you to the game.

* The turns run once a week.

* The game is open source and free

* A fresh game has started (turn 8) and has grown to 139 players, already.

> **http://www.shadowlandgames.com/olympia/**

means using tribute. This is essential, as it will allow both of you the breathing room you need to expand without worrying about defending here and there. If the time comes that you have to fund the process, so be it. I can't stress enough, though, just how important a good start is with Nemedia.

Those additional Imperial Armies are a must have to make the most of your situation. The easiest route, in my opinion, is through either Brythunia or Ophir, with Brythunia being the best choice, due to her lack of diplomacy and treasury. Just be sure to kill the only diplomat they have, if Zamora hasn't done it already, by turn 2. Ophir has good diplomacy, and a treasury that will support a tribute for enough turns to stop you dead in your tracks, being the only problem there. Otherwise you could roll right over them. Perhaps you can get lucky enough to tie down all of their diplomats in set piece battle in Ianthe? There's an idea.

You could also invade Corinthia, but the going wouldn't be as easy and swift as it would be in Brythunia or Ophir. Given the proper scenario where Cimmeria invades Aquilonia, I'd say that would be your second best option - if you have taken the necessary steps of proper avoidance and good intelligence. Even without Cimmeria weakened, you and Border Kingdom should be able to make short work of him. At any rate, no matter which kingdom you decide to invade, do it with both of your armies.

When you get that 3rd army, send it in, too. Keep the momentum going full steam ahead, and don't let up, until the peace years come around. You need to put your troops to work en masse, and overwhelm the enemy with superior force and tenacity. Also, load those armies up with characters. An army loaded

with characters is twice as formidable as it is without them.

Early on, you won't need to send both armies into the same province in Brythunia, Ophir or Cimmeria. Use 1 army for each province you invade and keep hitting them in pairs each turn if possible. Later in the game, as kingdoms grow in strength and provincial armies start adding up, you will probably want to send multiple armies into the same province, to win the day, decisively.

As for your court, make the most out of it on the first turn. Secure treaties with everyone that you don't intend to fight and avoid the influence, heavily, of the kingdom that you do decide to fight. You could probably avoid a few kingdoms with the diplomacy at your disposal, but for the best results, focus your attention and resources on just one very unlucky bastard. Keep your agent, Bastius Tarascus, busy with either assassinating diplomats with even adequate diplomacy (of the kingdom you're invading), or assassinating diplomats in kingdoms that you plan to invade in the future (or just want to see crumble by anyone's hand, should it further your agenda).

Keep the intelligence network running at full speed. Use your able characters to keep up to date on where your enemy's military is, who they're allied to, and where their characters are located, at all times. Things will go much smoother for you, that way. Be sure to get Border Kingdom involved with the effort, too. Above all, keep your starting court alive and well.

As others can verify, your starting corps of diplomats is the best you'll likely see with Nemedia. Keep them moving around each and every turn that their use isn't essential.
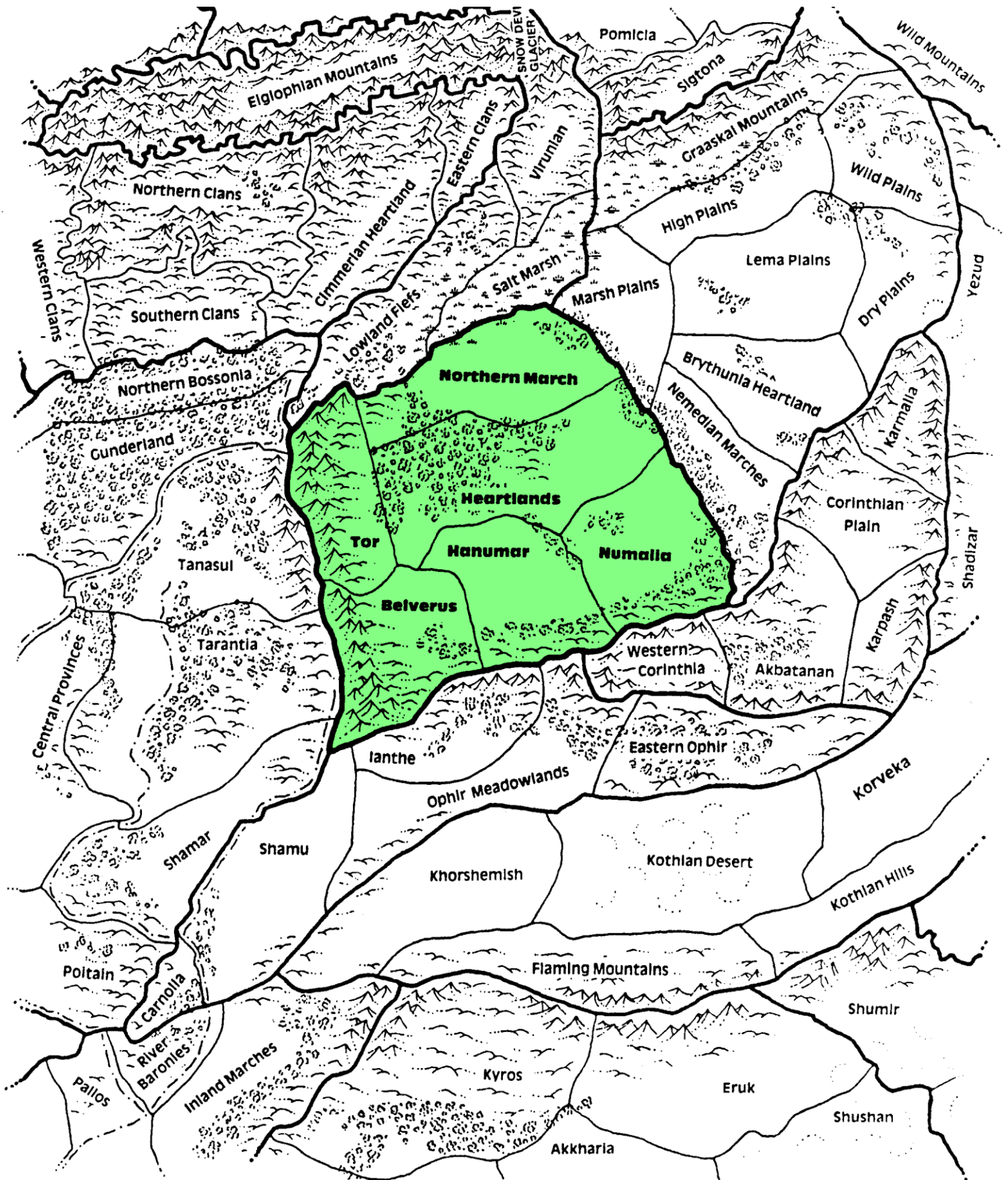
The Kingdom of Nemedia

I liked to have most of them protecting various provinces every turn, while using just one or two to avoid influence or seek peace treaties, and always having a few characters protecting the court as a whole.

Probably the most important part of any game is player-to-player diplomacy. Keep the dialogue open with as many kingdoms as possible. You never know where your next bit of vital information may pop up. North, south, east and west, anyone can be useful, at any time. Try to conserve your treasury, whenever possible. War faction bribes can cost more than stacking multiple armies in the same province. Know what you want to do and plan ahead, to make the most of your treasury. With careful and calculated planning, you will have the treasury the entire set of war seasons, to keep that military machine of yours running at full speed and raising the maximum amount of troops.

With all of your potential enemies, you'll need as many troops as you can get, too. I'd also suggest finding one additional ally, other than the Border Kingdom. Doesn't really matter where, just someone that you can go to for missions that your court isn't best suited for, such as breaking the alliance of two kingdoms with high avoidance of you, or assassinations, should you find your own court lacking in intrigue. An ally close by never hurts, though.

Also, don't forget about the Ice Age. I almost made a separate chapter of the spotlight for this. The barbarian kingdoms of Asgard, Cimmeria, Pictland, and Vanaheim will all be given a large kingdom to migrate to at the end of the game, as a goal. Nemedia is just as likely to be one of those kingdoms as any of the others are. There is no defense against it, and they can move to any of your interior or exterior provinces, without restriction. No peace treaties are possible against them, either. So, be sure to prepare, accordingly, late in the game. The best option would be to just destroy them, though. You'll find no lack of support in that endeavor from any of the other large kingdoms. Look to Turan for help, here. Even kingdoms such as Aquilonia, Hyperborea, Koth, and Khitai might jump on board, as they all stand to be the target of the migration, come the Ice Age.

CONCLUSION

I like Nemedia more than any other kingdom in Hyboria, obviously. I've played it 3 times now, and feel that I know it pretty well. Well enough to write this novel of a spotlight, anyway. I plan to play to win a game with her, sometime in the future. Nemedia has everything you need in the beginning of the game, and as such, you should put your numerous resources to use, with no inhibition, whatsoever. Take the northwest by surprise, and come storming out of the gates like an enraged Scarlet Dragon, laying waste to those who stand before you. Send forth your diplomats, your agents, and your armies. Conquer. Dominate. Fulfill your destiny as the greatest ruler Nemedia has ever known...

What is good in life? To crush your enemies, to see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentations of their women.

Submission Deadline
for Issue # 5 is
March 20th, 2014

Articles - Reviews - Op-Eds - Photos

Have something to say?
Be part of the dialogue.
Immortalize your opinion!

Suspense & Decision magazine

PBM needs YOU

What did they say about issue # 3?

"Another great issue."

"I can't help but notice that
my picture was not in the issue."

"I personally never played any PBM games,
but this zine has me considering giving it a go."

"This brought back some good memories."

"A really great read, and great to see
someone pick up the reins from Flagship."

"This 'zine is coming out at a prodigious pace."

KJC GAMES

presents

pHOENiX

beyond the stellar empire

http://www.phoenixbse.com

CHAMPION CITY COMICS
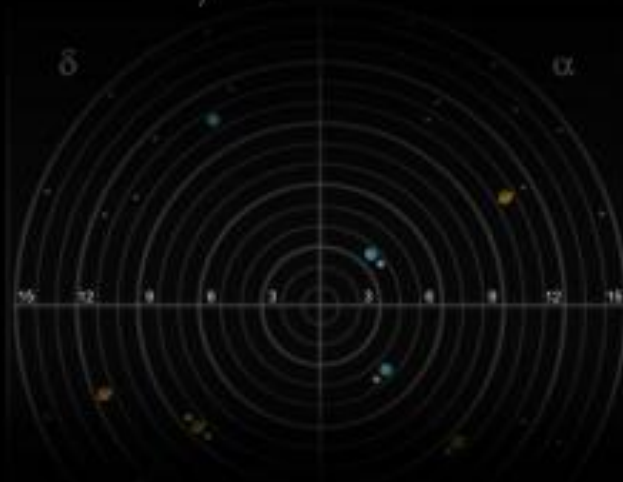
Be part of a gallant stand - Play PBM and Turn-Based games!

Clash of Legends

Fun and free strategic games since 2006

Clash of Legends

By: Charles Mosteller

I came across Clash of Legends, online. I don't recall exactly how. I was doing a search for something, I'm sure. It was a bit before I actually signed up.

And, fate being true to form, the timing of when the game started proved to be bad for me. Hey, I've got a magazine to publish! What's your excuse?

For some insane reason, I decided to try and join a Game of Thrones scenario. The position of House Hightower was assigned to me.

That has a nice ring to it, don't you think? House Hightower! But, I've got time. Plenty of time. Famous last words, as it turned out, but that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

For those of you who are looking for an in-depth article on this game, one written by someone who really invested a lot of time in reading up on the rules and preparing in earnest for the game, prior to it starting, I assure you - this isn't it!

No, this is the other article. The one authored by someone who doesn't have a clue what they are doing. Oh, sure, I've played PBM games, before. For many years, in fact. I'm an old pro at it. Well, old, anyway, maybe not so much a pro.

After all, this is the 21st Century. We have the Internet. Is it really necessary to even read the rules, in order to play a game, in this day and age? Eh? What's that?? Apparently, reading the rules is still very

much "in vogue," when it comes to playing a game.

Any game, apparently - and certainly, when it comes to playing Clash of Legends, skipping the rules probably won't significantly aid your chances of doing very well in this game.

Thank God, though, that my first game wasn't a team game!

Wait! That's right, I'm wrong about that. My first game of Clash of Legends, and my only game of it to date, in fact, saw me land smack dab in the middle of a team game. My profuse apologies to all of my fellow team members, who - by fate's cruel dictate, must suffer through my self-induced bloat of a learning curve. No doubt, long and hard will my allies pay for my Clash of Legends sins.

Fortunately, luck reared its head, hooking me up with allies who knew what they were doing. How very unfortunate, then, that I was so callous in my disregard for their sage advice. Let history record their wisdom and virtue, even as it assigns all blame for my folly to me.

So, you want to know about the game, huh? Just itching to find out some details? What's the matter, with you? Got no patience?

Very well, then, let's turn the page, and I shall proceed to let my tale unwind. Take heed at what I say, lest you find yourself mired in a similar situation. At least you will have the benefit of having been warned.

Before I give you access to the Royal Coffers of information on this particular game, though, let's back up a little.

There are lots of games out there. All sorts of turn-based wonders. Gaming choices that run the gamut, both literally and proverbially. Why Clash of Legends?

During my initial exploration of the game's website and information, the game reminded me in a way of several different games. Initial appearances can be deceiving, though.

As I explored, I found myself thinking of Middle-earth PBM, Fall of Rome, and Alamaze. Trust me - those are no light-weight contenders.

But, if PBM-type game fare is what I have an appetite for, why not just go with something like Starweb or Phoenix: BSE? I mean, after all, those aren't Johnny-come-latelies, either, if what I am hankering for is to write an article for this new PBM magazine of ours.

I highly suspect that more people have heard of all of those games, than have heard of Clash of Legends. I could be wrong, of course, but that's my impression, just the same.

And, so, for that portion of our readership that yearns for something new to sink its gaming teeth into, I opted to go with Clash of Legends. Now, let's see if I made a good choice.

Turn # 1

What in God's name was I thinking? Waiting until the last minute, to try and absorb what information about this game that I needed to know by instantaneous osmosis. In the waning moments of the day that this turn was due, it became punishingly obvious that

procrastination would soon weigh like a curse on my brow.

Like Middle-earth PBM, Alamaze, and Fall of Rome, there's a lot of information to absorb that can become immediately relevant, once game play starts.

In order structure and in economics, Clash of Legends reminds me a lot of those three games. Of the three, I would adjudge it to be more similar to Middle-earth PBM than the other two.

With only one turn (and numerous mistakes) under my belt, thus far, whatever comparisons that I can make are surface comparisons, rather than in-depth. That said and conceded, if you like any of those three games, I dare say that you will find something to like in Clash of Legends.

However, if you're looking for Middle-earth PBM or Alamaze, you won't find it here - at least, not in the Game of Thrones scenario that I signed up for.

I recall playing Middle-earth PBM, back when it was run by GSI (Game Systems, Inc.). That game possesses a far greater degree of atmosphere than Clash of Legends even pretends to offer the player, insofar as its Game of Thrones scenario is concerned - which is the only scenario or variant of the game that I have yet sampled.

Back when I tried Middle-earth PBM, all those long years ago, I was immediately beset by a sense of purpose. The Tolkien mythos of Middle-earth was palpable. That game enjoyed a sense of purpose that I can only describe as immediate.

Flash forward to Clash of Legends, all these many years later, and I find myself faced off against an entirely different kind of feeling.

Although I find myself in a team game, and although my fellow team members have been far more communicative with me than I have with them, the players of the game, themselves, aside, the Game of Thrones scenario leaves me feeling a bit flat, on the atmosphere portion of things.

I feel like I'm just a guy playing a position. The interface is nice. The game mechanics strike me as quite sound - of what little bit that I have experienced, thus far. But, wherever I may be, I definitely am not in Middle-earth.

Of Middle-earth PBM, Alamaze, and Fall of Rome, I have played Alamaze the least. Thus, it is with great trepidation that I even mention Alamaze in this comparison that I am engaged in.

Again, it's not the atmosphere of the game, nor the setting, that reminds me of Alamaze. Rather, the economics and structure of the order codes that bring that game to mind. Even still, for me as a player, one with some first-hand experience to call upon, Alamaze protrudes sharply from my memory, as I think about my budding experience with Clash of Legends.

In terms of pure atmosphere, of the three games that I compare Clash of Legends with, I think that it has more in common with Fall of Rome, than with either Alamaze or Middle-earth PBM.

In Clash of Legends' favor, though, I will say this for it - it doesn't come across with nearly so much of a generic feel as Fall of

> *My lord, Alchemist broke into the treasure vault at Oldtown and stole 4800 in jewels and gold. There was nothing that the guards could do to prevent the attack. We need to take action as the population is panicking.*

Rome did. There were a lot of things that Fall of Rome did well. I just don't think that atmosphere was ever really one of them.

Clash of Legends, on the other hand, has a tremendous amount of potential.

Potential, not just where game atmosphere is concerned, but for launching the equivalent of the proverbial thousand ships into the night - into the night of turn-based gaming at its finest.

My gut instinct tells me that Clash of Legends hasn't even begun to plumb the true depths of its potential, as a mechanism for the delivery of games of substance to the gaming public at large.

Into The Breach

Back to the specific game of Clash of Legends that I am in, though.

After one whole turn, House Hightower has not yet met its demise. Did you grasp the significance of that fact? That's right, baby! I'm still in this thing.

But, some scoundrel is pilfering my royal coffers. There's a thief afoot!

Almost five thousand gold coin of the realm snatched from right under my newbie-esque nose, and not a damned thing did I do about it.
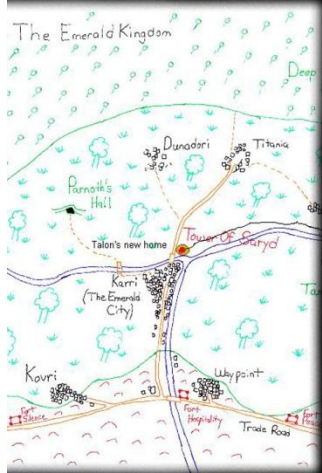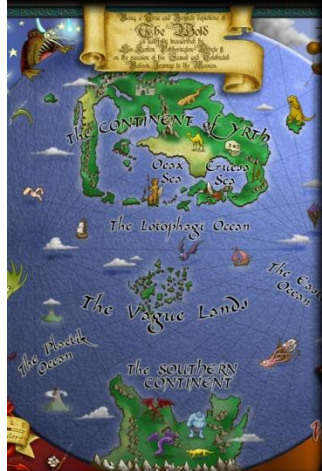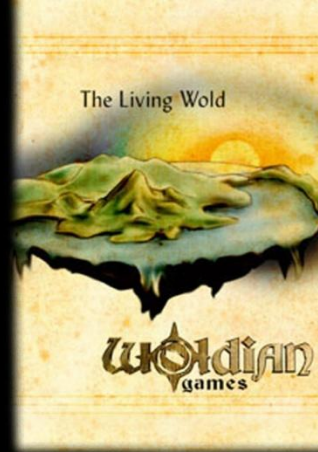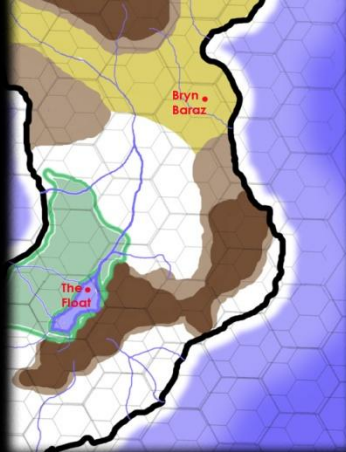
Yet.

I'm sure that you guessed it, already. Retribution shall be forthcoming! This rampant act of brazen thievery cannot be

allowed to stand, unchallenged. Time for retaliation.

Uh...who am I retaliating against?

Ah, the dilemma that these kinds of turn-based games have to offer. Right now, some other player is out there, and he (or she) is thumbing their nose at me. Their kingdom profits at my expense.

It's a good thing that I wasted those wizard orders, this turn. Say what?? That's right. Newbie mistakes. My team mate even tried to give me a heads up. Honestly, though, the real culprit was the clock. It just kept on ticking. I had to head off to work. I feel so sullied by this dreadful experience.

In spite of my first turn failures, I draw breath and I rule, even still, over this realm. Pay homage to House Hightower, PBM gamers everywhere! Let the lamps be lit throughout all of turn-based gaming. May I rule House Hightower, forever!

God save the king.

But, uh...who is the king, anyway? No, I'm talking about the REAL king. is there a real king, in this Game of Thrones scenario? You've got me on that one!

Hell, all that I'm trying to do, right now, is to survive through just one more turn.

My cities are growing. My influence is increasing. The cast of characters at my disposal is bigger, already.

What else could go wrong?? If experience is any guide, at all, probably any number of different things - none of which will be pleasant to read about, come next turn.

The greatest danger, at the moment, appears to be my kingdom finances.

Oh, how memories of playing Fall of Rome conjure themselves, anew, inside this brain socket of mine! What in Heaven's name do you mean that we've no gold to spare?!

For some strange and bizarre reason, it takes resources to accomplish things. Let this be a stern lesson to all of you out there that can't be bothered with the finer points of economic stew. Clash of Legends has a strong aroma of economic nuance about it.

It's probably not as complex of a gaming equation as that which one can expect to come from signing up for a game of Olympia. However, already, it seems more than a match for me, given my penchant for issuing orders first, and reading the rules second. Let the wise take heed and beware!

I draw a small measure of comfort from knowing that, had all of my orders for turn # 1 been processed, as issued, House Hightower may have spent itself into a state of bankruptcy, on turn # 1.

Alms for the poor, anyone?

Character Randyll Tarly

of

House Hightower

Visit the Clash of Legends website!

Where to start?

Reading the rulebook and familiarizing one's own self with various in-game commands seems a rather obvious place, for new meat entering the ranks of Clash of Legends' player base. However, my own recent experience leads me to advocate a different priority for the individual green to the game.

Set-up your e-mail client, by creating a special contact group for all of the players on your team - provided that you join a team game, on your first sign-up with the game.

Make this your highest priority, and it will serve you well. Of that, I am positive. I say such, speaking as one who knows all too well what it's like for the shoe to be on the other foot. I didn't do it - not when I first found out that the game had started, and trying to get orders issued for turn # 1 on the last day allowed by the game judge, before the turn got processed, proved to be a bit much to bite off.

Your allies can then help you to overcome your initial pre-game knowledge deficiency about the finer points of how Clash of Legends works.

Characters

I started the game with a Baker's dozen of characters of different types and stats. Commanders, rogues, diplomats, and wizards seemed to be the order of the day.

How well did my starting characters compare to everyone else's starting array of characters? Honestly, I have no clue. To acquire even that relatively mundane degree of useful knowledge would require an investment of both time and research, neither of which I have undertaken to any degree of note, as of this moment in time.

That said, I didn't get the feeling that my starting characters were the worst crop that was out there. Upon what do I base such an assertion? Nothing but pure, old-fashioned gut instinct, of course! Does one need more than that to tackle a game, these days?

Turn # 1 came and went, revealing to me through my turn results that characters' skill levels *can* increase, depending upon which particular orders that they seek to carry out.

All is not lost, after all - or so it would seem.

When you create new characters, as I undertook to do on turn # 1, you get to name them. This can be a plus or a minus for a game, depending upon the various players' respective naming schemes for their newly-created characters.

The game, having no real sense of atmosphere for me (at least, not yet), my blood was not surging through my veins, as I undertook the challenge of coming up with a new name for my characters-soon-to-be.

Harstool the Brave proved to be the height of my creative powers in action, circa turn number one.

Movement

Naturally, when you haven't a clue what you're actually doing, it's always a good idea to start clicking on things, and moving things around. Welcome to the realm of House Hightower under the rule of yours truly.

No matter how poorly I end up faring in this game, I have the ultimate out. It was all for you, my dear readers. All of the pain, all of the sacrifice, all of the botched opportunities. It was all a mere ongoing exercise in experimentation, and all for the lofty, noble, and worthy purpose of visiting enlightenment upon you, my fine audience.

The smokes and mirrors of magazine propaganda aside, though, the movement of both characters and armies seems straight-forward enough. Not quite as elegant as was the case in Fall of Rome, a few years back, but function and easily enough accomplished, in any event, for a game of this nature and type and style.

The Map

The map, itself, serves its inherent function well enough. It is in hex map form, and the various terrain types that dominate are clear enough to make them readily distinguishable from one another.

The icons that overlay them, however, while functional, remain a visual challenge. At least as of turn # 1, the map is no more visually appetizing than were the maps from Middle-earth PBM, some two decades or more ago, when I last played that game with GSI.

The character sketches, by contrast, provide the game with notably more visual interest, albeit of a somewhat cheesy, yet eye-pleasing, variety.

Speaking as the managing editor and publisher of a magazine that harkens back to a bit of a retro look, I'm probably not particularly well-positioned to lecture anyone on the finer points of visual aesthetics.

That said, I do feel, nonetheless, that Clash of Legends would stand to benefit enormously, from an upgrade of the visual elements associated with it.

Epilogue

I've written quite a bit, to provide such paltry degree of insight about this game, Clash of Legends. However, turn # 2 will soon be afoot, and spies are amongst us.

All things considered, my initial impression with Clash of Legends, having actually undertook to try it, now, is a robustly positive one.

The game engine has enormous potential, and I hope that those who are behind its creation have a hearty appreciation for how well that the underlying game engine could work with a near endless amount of scenarios.

I dare say that, even with such little experience as I have had with the game, to date, Clash of Legends could easily go toe-to-toe against such main PBM gaming fare as Middle-earth PBM and Alamaze. In its current incarnation, I would rate it as being a better game, when considered in sum totality, than Fall of Rome.

The key to exploiting the full potential that the game engine has to offer lies, I think, in allowing player communities to craft scenarios for it. If that can be achieved by those in charge of this beast of gaming potential (assuming that they even have any interest in pursuing that route, where future development of the game is concerned), then in all honesty, I really do think that the sky is the limit, and that gamers will flock to it in droves.

That said, my ally has impeccable timing. Even now, he sends word that Sansa has been assassinated.

Who in the Hell is Sansa, though??

In Hyborian War, players cannot assassinate the characters of other players' kingdoms on turn # 1.

Clash of Legends, however, appears to play by a different set of rules.

Now, about that Alchemist fellow. . .

PBM JUNE 1988 GAMES

1ST CLASS

ISSUE 1

THE PLAY BY MAIL GAMES MAGAZINE

£1·50

IT'S A CRIME

NY JETS
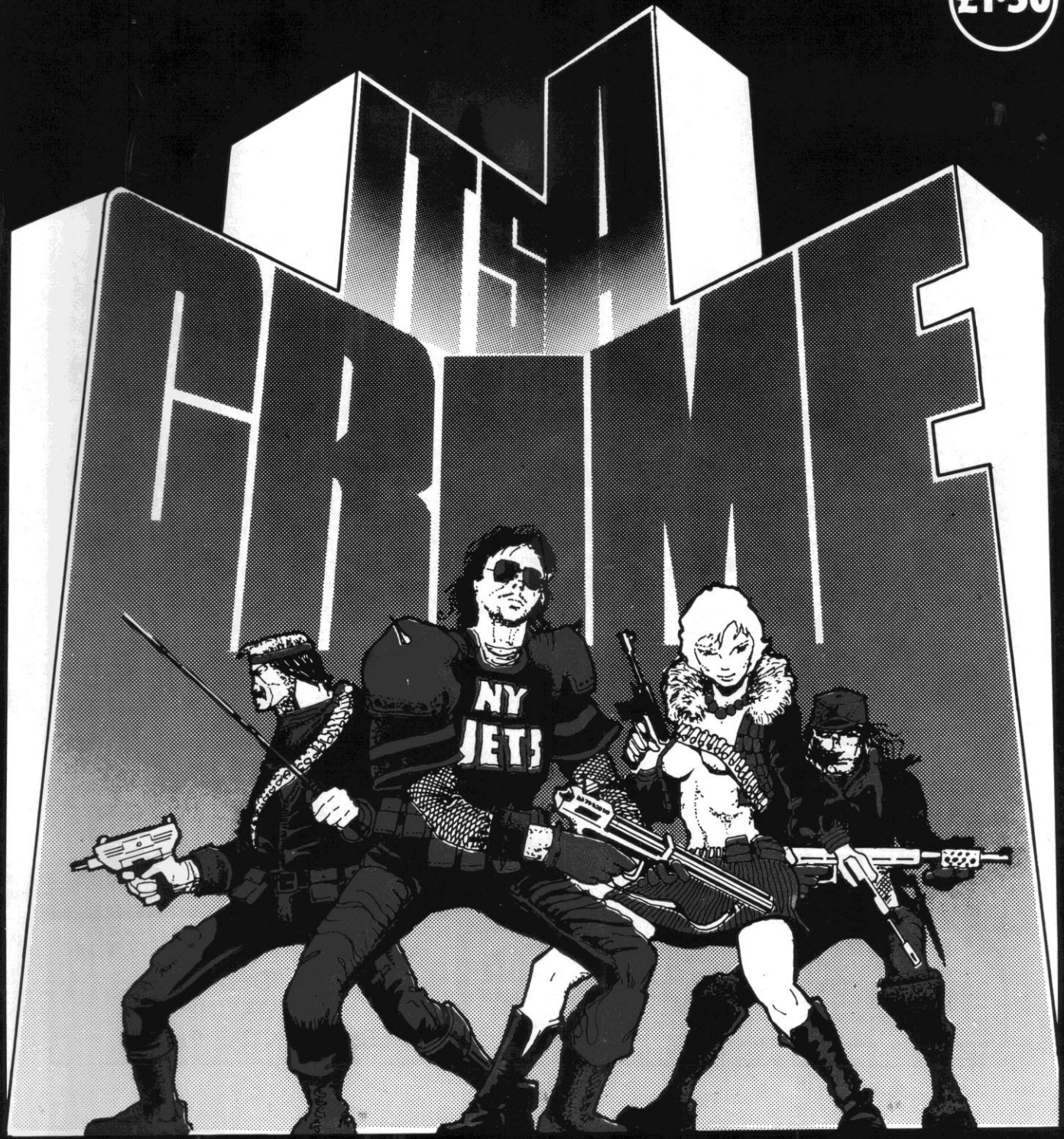
FREEDOM

DETINUS REPUBLIC

JOIN THE FIGHT!

TOLERANCE

DETINUS REPUBLIC

JOIN THE FIGHT!

ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED

NEVER OUTGUNNED

DETINUS REPUBLIC

JOIN THE FIGHT!

WE NEED YOU

EXPLORE, TRADE.
GOVERN, FIGHT

FOR TRUTH AND FREEDOM

DETINUS REPUBLIC

JOIN THE FIGHT!

What's In A Name?

By: Amber

What's in a name?

Trying to pin down a description of what Phoenix:BSE is.

I still remember the fummmph as the post came through the letter box (at a time when I was still just another player in BSE), ripping open the envelope to see if my latest attack had been successful, then filling the turn away in the appropriate row of folders. But, then I also remember when you got post before breakfast, then a second post in the afternoon. Play by mail games were proper play by mail, with stamps and everything, and there were those green turn cards that you had to fill in with a pen and send back.

Then came e-mail, when it seemed pretty much the same, but you could get your turn emailed to you to get it that little bit sooner, and have a bit of extra thinking time, before having to send your orders back in, still by post. That was, still, pretty much play by mail, as it still involved the postal service, even if it was just one way.

Then things started getting sophisticated, and you could email your orders in and get them back by email, but that was OK, as it just needed a little 'e' put in just the right place to make it play by email. Everyone knew it was the same thing. There was no confusion about what you were getting. It was just a bit more techie and up to date.

Then there was the next step and you no longer had to email the orders. There was

the online order editor. Select the orders from the drop down boxes, and it did the orders for you. Just put in the right orders, and remember to hit the send button, and then the results were emailed to you.

Then came the nexus, and now you don't even have to look at your emails. Everything you need can be found on the nexus. Look at game data, see your last turn, put your next orders in. It's all there. Emails haven't been completely removed, as people still use them to archive turns, but its' not play by email, anymore. So, what is it, then?

At the front of KJC's website, it says 'specialises in strategy management games'. At Madcentral, it says, 'Madhouse are the world's leading turn-based gaming (TBG, previously known as PBM, or PBEM) company. So, is it now a turn-based strategy management game? To me, that sounds like playing Risk on a Sunday afternoon with the kids. It doesn't really describe what it is.

True, that it does have turns, and you do have to manage and develop your strategies, but there is so much more to it than that. The fact that it is open ended, there is no having a practice game to see what it's about. The fact that your strategies may not be for the next 10 turns, but for the next year, the fact that you can use special actions to influence change that is not covered by the standard orders.

I always find it very hard to describe to non gamers what I do, most people don't even

understand what gaming is, nevermind PBM.

At my son's school, they were looking for ideas for after school clubs, and when a board gaming club was suggested, one of the other parents said, 'Oh, you mean like Cludo.' Trying to explain to people that you develop an online game (Oh, you mean like one of those flash games) that is text based (Oh, it's like a story forum, is it?), and people can role play (at which point you know that they are thinking about role play to spice up your love life, but are too polite to say anything) to develop their characters – well, I usually give up, and just say I do stuff on the Internet.

So, what should Phoenix:BSE be called, now? Open-ended turn-based role playing hand-GM-moderated strategy-management game with fully integrated nexus, including forum-library-game information-order editor-turns-notifications?

Or, could we call it what it is? PBM, just improved.

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. It is run by KJC Games.

The History of the Lands of Nevron

By: GM Ian Affleck

A play-by-mail game which started its journey in the early 1980's and is still running today. A Fantasy Role Playing Game based on the Rolemaster (ICE) system, with influences from Dungeons & Dragons/AD&D/Runequest/Warhammer.

The game is large, complex, and has a depth of detail providing an exciting and challenging environment to explore. There are many different locations, challenging Non-Player Characters, and many Players who over time have generated their own scenarios, conflicts, and challenges.

During the 1980's and 1990's, regular Newsletters called the Nevron Times were lovingly produced by the Arkwright Emporium, and kept the Players up-to-speed with events in the far reaching Lands of Nevron. The Times comprised articles, artwork, player messages, Character experience tables, and pictures. All of the Nevron Times are now published on the www.landsofnevron.com website for reference.

There were also occasional Over the Table (OTT) meetings, which were always well attended, and photos appear on the website, reminding everyone of friendships built on

25mm fantasy figures and playing out Nevron scenarios.

A one off Live role play event was even held on Cobham Common in Surrey, with a long weekend crashing and partying at the Overlords abode in Woking.
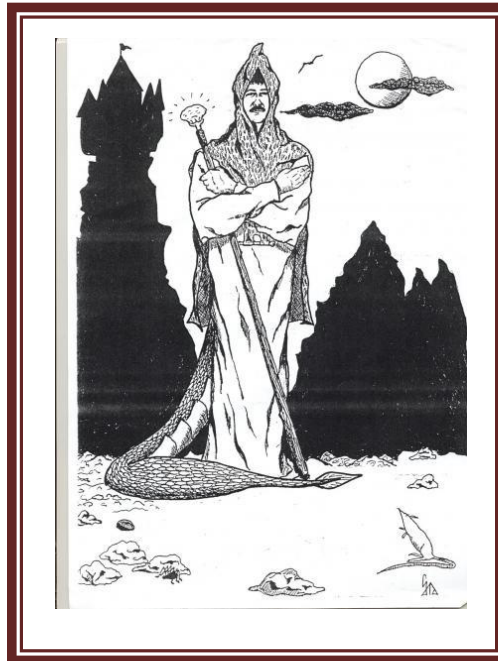
During the most productive period of LoN, even a short movie and Nevron music were produced. The music is also available on the Website.

A range of memorabilia is available for Players, including Lands of Nevron T-shirts; Mugs; Key Rings and Note books, featuring the Mysterious Overlord.

The start-up was simplicity, itself, with new players only having to provide a name for their Character, decide on a profession and outline a short description.

When the first turn arrived by snail mail, it contained the Rulebook and the Character details, such as equipment, hit points, description of location, magical spells, and selected rumours to get the Player started. The Character sheet provided details on skills, equipment, and the base details such as looks, likes, and preferences.

With each turn, Characters were awarded experience points, used to advance the

Character in skills and abilities. The length of time to advance varied greatly, depending on the specific experience the Character had, and could take some time, if taking a careful strategy. Exploration, fighting, and effecting cunning plans always well rewarded.

Character/Players were always kept on their toes, as one of the major differences with the Rolemaster rules (as opposed to some other rules), was that no matter how imbalanced a fight/conflict was, there was always a chance the little guy could win. Luck could play a huge part in deciding many outcomes, from fighting, to jumping ravines, to searching, to spell casting.

The number of players flexed greatly over the three decades, with the peak being 100 Players. It was recognised in Flagship Magazine in 2003 as the #1 PBM of its time, based on value and quality, which beat many professionally run Games of the time.

A hardcore of Players is still venturing in the Lands of Nevron, with the current status of Players and background information for the game detailed on the Lands of Nevron website. The game also has its own Facebook Group, where active and inactive Players still swap messages and occasional Character insults.

Supporting the Lands of Nevron, another scenario is running called the Monastare Challenge, which has a different set of Player Characters, and is run by another GM called Rodger Parks. The Challenge has 20 Players (although fewer, now, as several Characters have already been eliminated), but with only one Character able to survive, it is an intense game of nerve, tactics, and luck. More detail on the Monastare Challenge on the LoN and OtC websites.

A sister Website to www.landsofnevron.com is www.overthecable.com, which supports PBM and any games played over the table, with a view to supporting the hobby in a world of new technology - hence, Cable instead of Table.

Over the Cable (OtC) Gaming

Back in the glory days of Fantasy Roleplay Postal Play By Mail (PBM) and Over the Table games using figurines, much fun was had, but as technology has progressed and online games have developed and provided its own source of Fantasy Roleplay, I can't but help think something has been missed. The principle of Over the Cable Gaming (OtC) is to take the best elements of the retro style of Fantasy Roleplaying gaming with the new technology capabilities, resulting in another method of satisfying those pangs for adventure.

Some of the differences of OtC over games of the ilk of World of Warcraft, which I play and totally enjoy, are:

- **No faction.**

- **No safe havens.**

- **You can play whenever, but not needing to be online together to work as a team.**

- **More options for characterization, and no limits to how you can describe your Character.**

- **Probably debatable, but my view is OtC is more intellectually challenging.**

- **No limits on levels.**

- **OtC can use many different Rule sets, such as Rolemaster; D&D; AD&D;**

Heroquest; Runequest; Warhammer; Spycraft; Call of Cthlulu etc..

● **Multiple GMs providing different styles of play.**

● **OtC will probably work out a cheaper option.**

● **Success not dependent on speed or eye/hand co-ordination.**

To be balanced, the negatives could be:

● **Fewer players at anytime to interact with, so no 50 people Raids likely on OtC.**

● **Online games are always there, all the time, for your Fantasy fix.**

● **Online games still have the elements of developing your character, levelling etc..**

● **Online games usually look really good.**

My view is to look at OtC Gaming as an add to your Fantasy fix, and not to be positioned to replace Online style gaming.

This website is my attempt to develop the OtC concept, and bring some of the retro feel of PBM and Over the Table back.

An OtC Scenario, "The Stash," has been piloted and completed with 12 Players, to test the GM activities/Website admin/Player Experiences. All of the turns for this Pilot are displayed on the website, to give any potential new players an insight in to how this genre works.

A Call of Cthulhu scenario is currently underway, and three positions are currently available.

If you are interested in taking part in a future Scenario, or have any views on the above, then please send me an email at nevronian@aol.com.

The Website also has a start at trying to build a PBM Museum, which is a section to remember those glorious days of Play-by-Mail, when the highlight of the day was the arrival of the Postman - and the thud on the floor, as your latest turn arrived. Artifacts to some of the games I took part in and have very fond recollections of are posted on the site, to honour the hours put in by the Players, but also the hard pressed Games Masters themselves - hats off to your imagination, the entertainment you provided, and the many rolls of dice. I salute you all.

This is my gallery of some of the games I was involved in. If you have comments or examples of the games here, or other games, then use the Contact form provided on the site and let me know, and we can build the Museum, further. If you have any picturess of Turnsheets etc., then send them through as a JPEG.

Do you remember Ohvee; Crasimoff's World, Saturnalia, The Isles, Barony of the Rivers, The Untamed Lands, Taskmaster, and Earthwood?

Keep the Faith as The Mystery Unfolds............
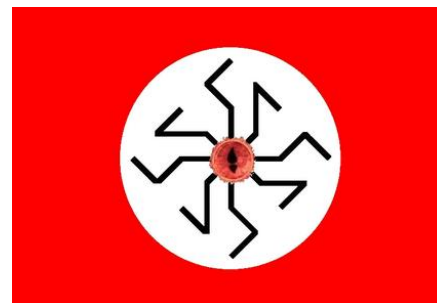
Issue #4 - Survey Results

PBM Bulletin Responses received from PlayByMail.Net mailing of 02/14/2014

Q. What is the best PBM game that you have ever played, and briefly explain why you feel that way.

It's gotta be Diplomacy. Simultaneous submission of orders makes it perfect for PBM. Easy to learn, with depths to keep you interested for (literally) decades, tons of interesting variants, cost is pennies to free, practically open source means you can invent your own versions, available in both machine and human adjudicated forms. And most of all -- Incredible FUN!

* NOTE: Only one person responded to the survey sent out by e-mail. Hopefully, more of you out there will take a moment out to respond, the next time that we send a survey out. Or, if you have questions for the survey, send them in and we can include them in the next survey.

Interstellar Cluster Wars

Interstellar Cluster Wars is game of Exploration, Colonization and Conquest. Planning and management skills, along with strategy & tactics, become ever more valuable as the game progresses. As other Players are encountered, diplomacy becomes an additional requirement.

In this roughly bimonthly computer-generated turn driven game, you are given control of a habitable world, along with its various population types and all of its manufacturing, and research facilities. As a sole planetary ruler, you will write its orders/instructions electronically and they will be fully carried out as other rulers in various corners of the cluster are doing the same.

As supreme ruler, you will lead your home world, along with the population and production that you control, through a period of accelerating economic and industrial development and expansion. This era of growth and technological advances will quickly fuel the need for interstellar exploration and colonization. Voyaging into deeper space, establishing your mining bases and projecting a

military presence, you will continue to expand into the neighboring star systems where you eventually will encounter other space faring civilizations. Ultimately it is in this interstellar arena that you and the other emerging alien empires will struggle for economic control and military supremacy. Strategy, Military tactics, Machiavellian alliances (or perhaps just plain brute force), will eventually yield a sole dominant power.

Join The Game?

* We are currently running our second play test game.

* More games will be started as we progress thru the project.

* All test games are currently free.

If you would like to play, send Email to:

vholford@roadrunner.com

Interstellar Cluster Wars

Suspense & Decision
A look at the download numbers

November 2013

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	38

December 2013

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	445
Issue # 2	223

January 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	71
Issue # 2	193

February 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	121
Issue # 2	141
Issue # 3	486

Total # of issues downloaded to date = 1,718

Issue # 1 = 675	Issue # 2 = 557	Issue # 3 = 486

* NOTE: Incomplete downloads for issue # 3 for February 2014, alone, were 16,727. We present them for comparison's sake, only.

* NOTE: Download numbers presented here do not track downloads of issues that are downloaded from websites other than PlayByMail.Net.

*NOTE: These figures account for downloads through 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on February 28th, 2014.

*NOTE: Since the premiere issue of Suspense & Decision magazine was not released until the end of the month of November 2013, the data presented here only really reflects approximately three full months of download statistics.

*NOTE: Download statistics are derived from Awstats.

Garcia Enterprises (Affiliation code 4 - shortened to GCE)

We are a small/medium neutral affiliation, dedicated to trade, exploration, Starbase and Planetary management, shipbuilding and research. We are a family owned business, owned and managed by Mr Fernando Garcia, as such we are a business and not a nation and therefore do not get involved in wars, although we will sell arms to whoever requires them and run warships for anti-pirate missions and escort duties. We are also a multi-Species affiliation, so any race is welcome in our midst.

We have access to all the public areas of space and some private areas as well and are well respected by everyone. GCE is a good place to learn the game as you will not get any hassle from most people, only pirates and only then if you leave ships in the middle of space and not in orbits of planets between turns.

* Garcia Enterprises is an active affiliation in the game, [Phoenix: BSE](#).

*Image is "Courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech."

New to the Bottom? Not sure What to do? You need . . .

TROLL TACTICS

This article is a reprint that first appeared in Issue # 1 of 1st Class magazine.

(Courtesy of Mica Goldstone of KJC Games)

. . . And as Hogg sat in Troll heaven thinking of his glorious days on the Bottom he heard a distant splash, and then another. He scratched his head and thought for a while and then looked up in surprise as drops of Water fell down upon his head, making him less than dry Granting and groaning he stood up and moved cautiously across his cloud to see what was going on as there was another splash . . .

*.. . Looking down from the edge of the cloud he saw a strange sight indeed. Three islands where no islands should be. Suddenly with a whoosh and splash another appeared as though by magic (which it probably was) and an enormous fountain of spray flew up, right past Hogg nose and then back down on his head, making him **slightly wet** . . .*

*. . . He watched a while longer and islands appeared with ever greater frequency until in a short while islands were scattered everywhere and Hogg was **very we**t . . .*

*. . . And still they continued to appear until a **soaking wet** Hogg yawned and stumbled back to the middle of his cloud for a long soggy sleep . . .*

Yes, it's true. New islands have been appearing all over the place, probably about a hundred of them by now, though all are not yet populated. The Trolls Bottom game has just been given the most massive publicity boost in the history of PBM and has become a rival to It's a Crime as the most popular PBM in Europe. As everyone who is reading this should by now have received a copy of the rules and a free setup there seems little point in reviewing the game so instead we asked Hogg, our resident troll, if he had any advice for you. Fortunately he did, otherwise there would be a Troll-sized hole in the middle of the magazine.

THE MAP

As everyone knows the map is 40 holes long by 10 holes across. What a lot of trolls fail to realise is that North is not at the top of the map but at the left hand end. It is especially important to remember this when using tunnels. A tunnel leading north from hole 83 will lead to hole 93, not to hole 84. The second most common mistake is trying to move directly from the top of the map to the bottom. For example, hole 80 is not next to hole 81. Hole 80 is at the top of one column and 81 is at the bottom of the next. This is a mistake even experienced players make so be careful.

MAKING BREWS

Making brews is not always as easy as it looks. As well as all the ingredients you now need a certain minimum tole for the brew to be successful. The tole required depends on which brew you are making. Wonga Surprise is an easy one and requires a tole of just 100, whereas Smoka Supreme requires a tole of at least 200. As new brews are introduced in the future you will be told how much tole is required for each.

TOLE

Tole does not just affect the Prepare Brew order. Other orders will be affected too so having a good tole is important. The higher the tole of your troll, the cleverer he is. Certain orders will earn more tole than others and you will find these through trial and error but the important thing is to avoid losing tole through failed orders. Everytime you fail to accomplish an order you will lose tole.

Sometimes this will be because an order was written incorrectly but more often it is because something has happened in between your turns which you do not know about. In particular this can happen when your actions involve other trolls. Issuing 10 attack orders against a troll who may not be there anymore is not wise. If he is there, well you will do a lot of damage to him (and probably yourself as well) but if he has moved you will not achieve anything and will lose masses of tole into the bargain. Plan your attacks carefully. The same applies to rob and investigate missions. They will not work if your target has moved away.

STRENGTH

Always try to keep your strength up. Regular hunting and good meals should make this

easy even if you are being hammered from all sides by enemies. Problems may arise if the Weather becomes TOO good as trolls will be too scared to hunt so keep a good stockpile of food in case this happens. If your stockpile is running low steal food from someone else.

BUILD

Trolls who let themselves become a DYING HEAP are in serious trouble. Build is normally regained at the rate of just 5 points per round. If you are being stomped badly it is possible to lose 40 or 50 in a turn! Move quickly and keep moving to stay out of trouble for a while and eats lots of fruit. Large quantities will increase the rate at which build is regained but not enough to withstand a constant battering. Certain special possessions and brews will also help you gain build but you'll have to find out which ones. Be careful, some possessions will cause further build loss.

SANITY

Troll sanity is an optional extra. It can be useful but is not necessary and being mad does have advantages as long as you do not go to extremes and become a MELON. If you do this you will be of no use to anyone least of all yourself. Hogg spent most of his life being dangerously insane and avoided becoming a melon by a careful diet of fruit. If you find yourself becoming TOO sane make some noise. Morale will go up but sanity will drop.

MORALE

Like all creatures, trolls prefer to be happy but the most effective fighters are often those with dismally low morale. A suicidal troll is a fearsome opponent. Death would be preferable to their miserable existence and
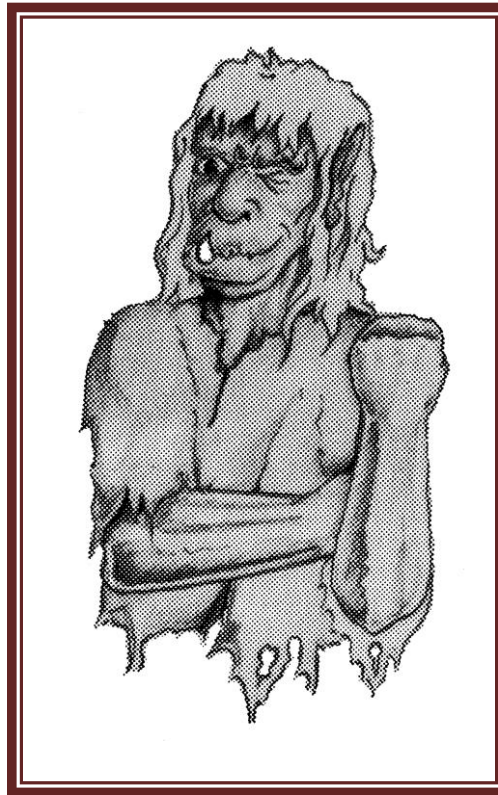
thus they fight with no thought for personal safety. Being hysterically happy can help too though. A truly happy troll will not let a few scratches deter them from a fight.

FIGHTING

Apart from the fact that other trolls move when you least expect it there are other reasons for not attacking one ten times in a single round. Even if you win the first few combats the other trolls combat strength may increase while yours decreases! How does this happen? A troll who has been beaten in combat loses both sanity and morale. As a result of repeated attacks a troll can become more and more insane and totally suicidal and as noted above both of these may help in combat. The advantage gained from these factors will often be greater than the disadvantages of losses to strength and build. If things go badly you will lose large amounts of tole, strength and precious build. You may even wipe yourself out.

NPCs

Hogg's tactic was always to avoid these like the plague. Whether this was a good tactic or not I'm not sure but he was always one of the strongest trolls on the island and also the cleverest until forced to retire at the end of last year. Balrogs in particular are thoroughly unpleasant creatures and even attack their own servants. Apparently the Great Eagle is friendly but very difficult to find or talk to.

POSSESSIONS

The uses of ordinary possessions are obvious. Food is for eating and weapons are for hitting things with, but what about those special possessions? What do they do? There is a wide variety of different special possessions, most of which seem to be magical in nature and all of which do something different. Some will even do several different things depending on the

situation. There are four ways to find out what they do.

Firstly, watch the extracts from the explorers diary. This contains all sorts of hints on possessions as well as other aspects of the game. If you can find nothing here ask other trolls. You should find that at least some of your neighbours are prepared to talk to you. (If they won't talk, move quickly. They may be planning to use more physical means of communication.)

If you still cannot find out what it does either guess (surely the uses of a green bean are obvious) or try it and see. Just write U followed by the item code and see what happens. You may be pleasantly surprised.

ALLIANCES

There is a lot of diplomacy in Trolls Bottom and if you want to stay alive until the later stages of the game you should make sure that you have good friends. It is not uncommon for four or five trolls to gang together to kill a neighbour. As soon as their unfortunate victim is dead they choose a new one and start again.

Find some allies early in the game and let Other trolls know that killing you will result in their own early demise. This should keep you out of trouble until the middle stages of the game. After this the words will have to be backed by actions. Nearly all the surviving trolls will be in an alliance and you will really have to make sure your alliance holds together when the fighting starts.

If you can survive this stage then you will probably make it into the final phase when it's every troll for himself. Only one of you can win and your allies will probably stab you in the back if you don't do it to them first!

THE WIZZARD & GOLLUM

Those of you playing when Project Basilisk were running the game have asked what

happened to these two characters. They were both NPCs which PB planned to introduce but which had not been written into the programs. In the past few months we have been extremely busy getting the game ready for its relaunch last month but now this is done we can start work on the game development again. In addition to Gollum and the Wizzard we have plans for some new possessions and brews as well.

MULTIPLE TURNS

A few players try to get their turns processed quicker by sending in several turns at once. Turns should not be sent until you have received the results of your previous turn. If several arrive together only the first one will be processed immediately. The others will either be held for several days and then processed or returned with the results of your first turn. Sending in several turns at once is fair to other players but can also be disastrous for your own position as the information on which the turns are based will be completely out of date by the time your final orders are processed.
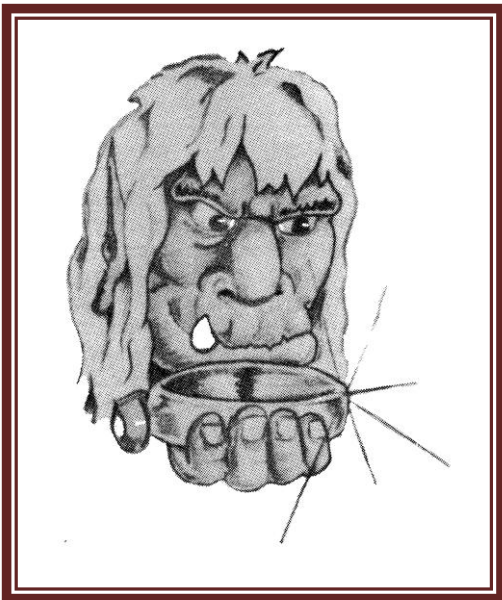
Keep In Mind

* Not every PBM or other turn-based game that exists is mentioned in this magazine. If you know of a great game, tell us about it. Be sure to tell us, not only that you like it, but WHY you like it.

Are you a Game Moderator?

* If you are, we invite you to advertise your game(s) with our magazine. While we can't guarantee results, we can and do offer free advertising opportunities. Currently, we offer no paid advertising. Every advertisement that you see in this issue was ran free of charge. We hope that you will consider advertising with us!

Being There

Origins / GenCon 1988

By: Rick McDowell

This was the biggest of the national game conventions historically-to-date, and may still be so, because the two largest independently combined in Milwaukee that year. Subsequently, they split again, and Origins has been at Columbus, Ohio most years. So, this convention was something like 25,000 gamers, for about four days.

The Awards Presentation was right off the bat in the Schedule of Events. At this time, the winners were all secret (when Fall of Rome won, years later, they told me ahead of time), so it was a great surprise, as we were outsiders making our first appearance and didn't have connections. While pretty much the whole gaming universe was represented, computer games were still pretty new, for example. But, it was a very good year for games. See if you recognize most of the winners, from the Origins website:

The 1987 Origins Awards -
Presented at Origins 1988

Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame of 1987
Shogun - Milton Bradley - Mike Gray

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame of 1987
Arkham Horror – Chaosium - Richard Launius, Lynn Willis, Charlie Krank

Best Graphic Presentation of a Boardgame of 1987

Shogun - Milton Bradley Co - Alec Jutsum, James Brenner

Best Play-by-Mail Game of 1987
Alamaze - Pegasus Productions

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Computer Game of 1987
Pirates – Microprose - Sid Meier

Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame
Dave Arneson

Best Professional Roleplaying Magazine of 1983
Dragon

I was there with a crew of three others - my two brothers, Phil and Russ, and my friend, Bill Flad (I was his best man at his wedding). We had a great time showing off Alamaze and enjoying the whole experience.

We had a great location for our booth / table, next to Reality Simulations - who were there for their PBM game, Duelmasters, right inside the main entrance to our exhibit area. Our Origins area was about half of the whole exhibit area of several hundred thousand feet, with PBM, adventure gaming, RPG, computer games. Pretty much everything, except miniatures (which are huge at these things) and board games and model trains and such, which were in the other main hall, which was mainly GenCon stuff.

The four of us spent most of the time showing maps, rule books, turn results, and
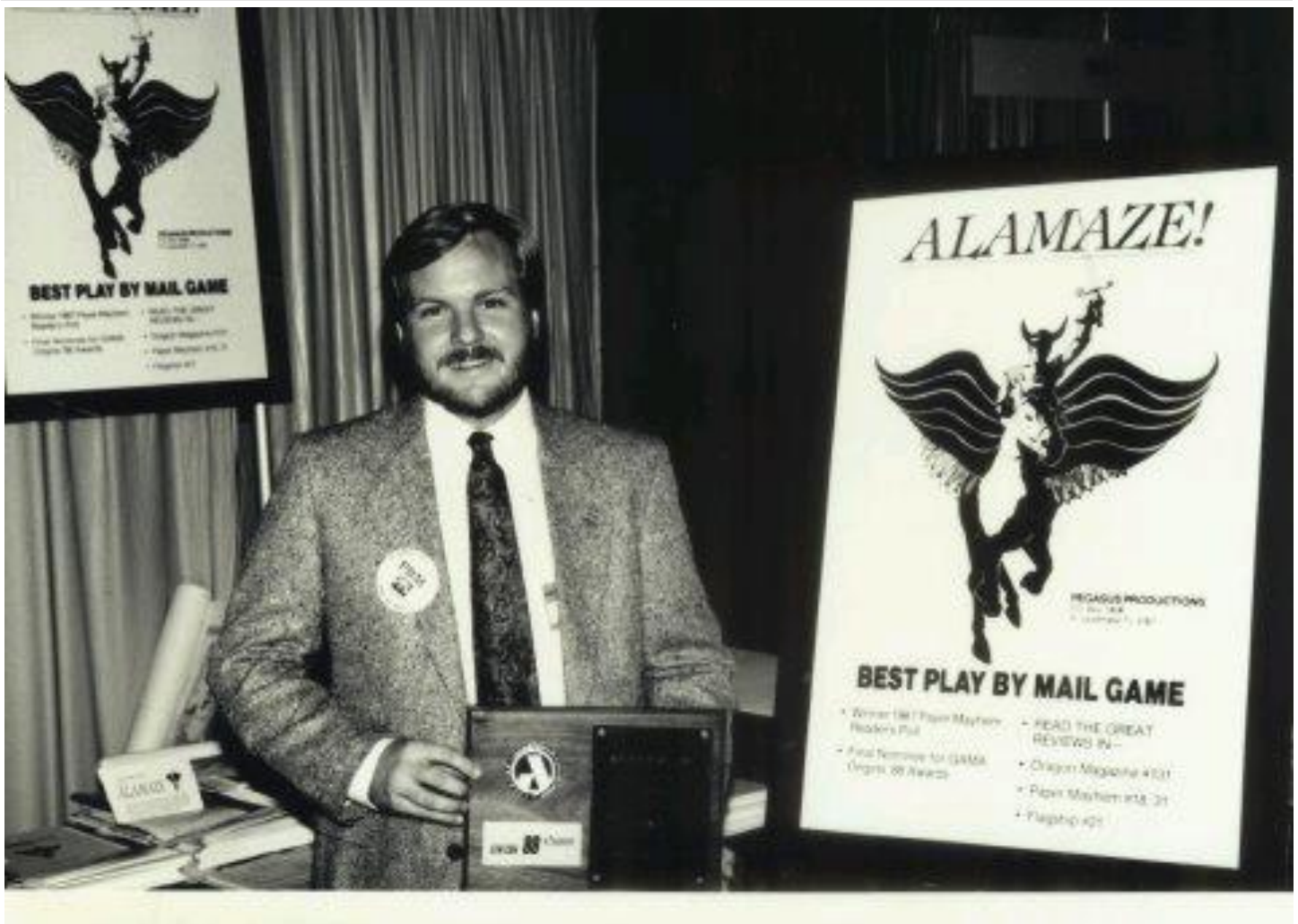
Fall of Rome game designer, Rick McDowell, at Origins/GenCon 1988.

talking about Alamaze and its kingdoms, and wandering around the exhibit halls, while the like-numbered RSI people talked and demonstrated Duelmasters, visitors rolling up their gladiators and maybe ten minutes later, getting the results of their first duels. It was good, but I think we stole most of their visitors' attention, while they were waiting for results, telling them about Alamaze. The RSI folks played Alamaze (and would later license it), and we played Duelmasters, before meeting face-to-face, here.

It was here that they learned, for the first time, that we were the infamous ones that had diabolically deployed teams such as "Struck in the Head," featuring gladiators named after famous phrases in Duelmasters'

results. Sophomoric examples of our gladiators' names were, "his left buttocks", "the crowd", and "his mother in-law". It seemed quite hilarious. So while typical results for "normal people" might be:

"Sir Gord is sweating profusely", or "Galron lunges forward wildly", or "Boris is struck in the head!"

Our results would be, things like, "The crowd is sweating profusely! The crowd can no longer stand!" Or, "His mother in law is struck in the head! ", or "His left buttocks lunges forward wildly!"

So, we all got a kick out of that, and the RSI moderators said, "Ack! You are <u>those</u> guys!"

All the RSI people were nice, and we got along great, and I enjoyed meeting Paul Brown, the head of RSI. He was a young guy, heir to at least part of the Wonder Bread dynasty, and had lots of big ideas.

Paul and I had several conversations, then and later, leading to RSI licensing Alamaze from me, and engaging me to design their Forgotten Realms licensed game. He may have secured that license from TSR at that event, with founder Dave Arneson in attendance.

Paul and I had dinner and drinks, later, with Michael Gray, the designer of the famous award winning board game, Shogun (see above). Michael had sought me out, as he was the author of the article in Dragon Magazine that was so favorable, and I think likely responsible for Alamaze winning Game of the Year from out of nowhere in the gaming community, not to mention adding 500 Alamaze players after the Dragon review came out, and had not previously met. I really consider Shogun one of the best board games ever, and can look up from my desk at a collectors, still cellophane wrapped copy of it I acquired years later.

I believe it was Day 2 or so that Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo came by our berth with his programmer, and asked for a few moments. Some small talk, all cordial, and the question he most wanted to know was, "What language did you program Alamaze in?" When I told them it was in Symphony, I don't think either of them believed me (it is true), and they walked away talking quietly to one another using many hand gestures. I saw Rick, again, many years later in Columbus, when Fall of Rome won Game of the Year, and he approached me several times over the years about keeping the nomination process for PBM Game of the Year going.

Being honored for career achievement that year was Dave Arneson, co-developer (with Gary Gygax) of Dungeons & Dragons. They did OK with that franchise.

Wandering around the halls, we saw Lord British, fully regaled, promoting the Origins series, then considered the best of computer RPG's. I met briefly Sid Meier, who is one of the greatest designers ever, winning his first Game of the Year for Pirates (see above). Sid later would refer to Alamaze and similar games as "Electronic board games", which I think is as good a succinct description for most PBM as there is. Lots of actors wandering around in costume as Klingons or wenches, activities and demonstrations and presentations going on. Game artists were there, and everyone on my team bought at least one signed print. We also bought Blood Bowl, the board game that was a hit that year (and for many years later), and experienced the Milwaukee night life - which lived up to the stereotypes.

It was a memorable time, recalling it now, about 25 years later….

Rick McDowell
Alamaze and **Fall of Rome** Designer
www.alamaze.co

ALAMAZE

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?

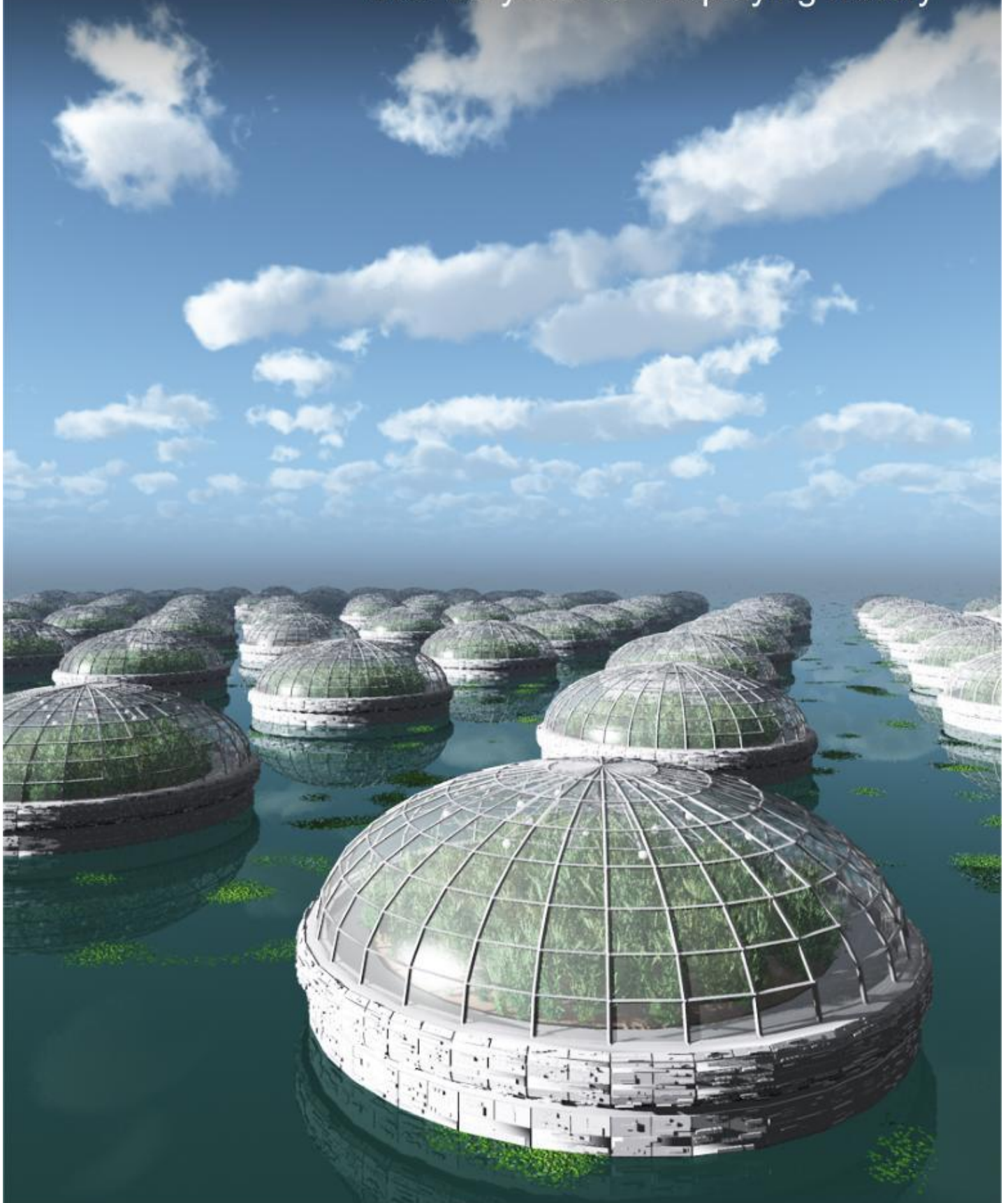**Lead your kingdom to glory eternal! Call up your bannermen, summon your wizards, dispatch your spies, sound the horns of battle and charge!**

Discover ALAMAZE! SIGN UP NOW!

phoenixbse.com

over 20 years of roleplaying history

Increasing the Player Base of Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire

By: Amber

Recently, GrimFinger asked the players of Phoenix:BSE some questions regarding the game. There was one question which stood out for me, as it is something that we have been struggling over for some time now, and it is something I constantly come back to thinking about.

"What change, or changes, if any, do you think needs to be made, in order to double the player base of the game in the shortest amount of time possible?"

Straight away, I can name two things that, in my opinion, would dramatically increase the player base of Phoenix (and I stress that these are my views, and not the views of KJC Games, who actually run the game).

Point One : Make the game free to play.

Currently in the game, ships are free to play; other aspects you have to pay for. Current costs taken from the website are:

Ships/GP's/Agents/Operatives - **Free**

Starbases - **£2.25 per week**

Special Actions/Explorations - **£1.80 each**

Outpost Update - **£0.70**

Platform Update - **£0.70**

Standard Political Position (Update requests cost £2 each) - **£2 per week**

* Political Position + 5 bonus outpost/platform updates. (i.e.: merely £1 for 5 updates, each and every week.) - **£3 per week**

* Political Position + unlimited outpost/platform updates. (i.e.: merely £2 to get an update of everything you own, each and every week. For some players with in excess of 50 outposts, this is an absolute bargain!) - **£4 per week**

Let me start by saying, that as things are at the moment, it is a lot cheaper to play now, than it was, say, 15 years ago. I can remember when I was playing in AFT, and my husband was in the SMS, if we had lots of ship battles, our combined cost was £500 a month. They used to be called wallet wars, as the players with the most money could send in the most ships to win. Nowadays, that would be unheard of, as ships are free to run, and that was one of the defining moments of the game - when the decision was made to stop charging for ships. There are certainly arguments that could be made, as to whether that was a good point or not, but it did certainly change the game, and made a more even playing field - at least, in terms of ship battles.

The emphasis has shifted, now, so that it is the person who can produce the most can have more influence in the game, and so starbases (or rather, players who can run starbases) are sought after by all affiliations. I think that any game that has an element of

pay within it (rather than a flat fee conscription) will always have some way for players who pay to gain advantage over those who cannot (or do not want to) pay. That is not to say that you cannot play the game or have enjoyment doing so, but you have to accept that you will not have as much influence within the game as someone who is willing to pay more.

I would say a reasonable amount to pay for a game each month is the same as going out for a meal or going to the pub for a night. It provides a lot more entertainment for your money, but if you think of it in terms of pints of beer, you can rationalise it. So, say I set myself a budget of £30 a month, I would have an upgraded political with unlimited updates (£4), two starbases (£18), four special actions (£7.20), leaving me with 80p change.

I think that's a reasonable amount to pay, and would give me a little bit of influence within the game. Also, it is a fixed cost that I know I could spend every month, with no hidden extras. That is a lot more than you would expect to pay for a subscription to a MMO every month, so how come it is still so expensive, in comparison? The fact that it is hand moderated with special actions gives it that very personal, but expensive, touch.

Which leads us back to the original point, if Phoenix was completely free to play, it would have a lot more players join, but what sort of a game would it be? To be free to play, all human interaction would have to be removed from it - no special actions, no tweaks to get it how you wanted rather than what you submitted, no game development. KJC would soon go out of business, and then there would be no one to run it, at all. It would possibly end up being run as some-one's hobby, until turns are run less and less

frequently, and then it stops, altogether. I would love Phoenix to be free to play for everyone, but until I win the lottery, I can't see it ever happening.

Point Two : Restart.

Possibly one of the most controversial words that you can ever say at a pubmeet, everyone has an opinion on this, and it is guaranteed to start a debate to last for hours - especially after a few pints. We have been told in the past by so many people that, if you restart Phoenix, then all my friends would come back to play. Phoenix is a persistent world that has been running for over 20 years, now. In that time, it has been ported over to a completely new games system, but the players have carried over their characters and roleplaying through the transitions that have taken place. So, this is a story that has been unfolding for the past 20 years. It has a wealth of accumulated knowledge and assets, in which huge power blocks vie for control, and single affiliations control vast areas of space. Entering as a new player is very daunting, and only the most dedicated will stay around to try to wrestle with the antiquated rules and mishmash of advice scattered across the forum. There is no set way to progress in the game. You have to make your own goals, and there is no winning criteria.

For a restart, all the players could start afresh. They could choose their own alliances, and which areas of space to go for. They could compete on a level playing field for technology and equipment. There would be no mega starbases or fleets of disposable ships. There would be no prior histories that dictated how you should be playing your affiliation - you could make it how you wanted it to be. I could imagine that ex-players would come flooding back to make

their stamp on the unfolding timeline, traverse vast areas of undiscovered space and explore planets untouched by anyone, before. However, for all the old players that come back, what about the existing players that have stuck with it through thick and thin? They have worked hard to build up their affiliations, overcoming the obstacles through the years, persevering until they have carved their own little niche in the universe. How many of them would be happy to see all their hard work wiped out overnight, for the possibility of a few extra players rejoining?

Everything would be peachy for at least the first six months. Then, perhaps one affiliation is annihilated by another, or plans go wrong and they suffer a serious setback in their bid for galaxy domination. One player gets lots of his buddies to play, and they dominate as they can afford to run more starbases and pay for more special actions, and they research higher technology way before everyone else. Do you declare them a winner, and restart again, as everyone else has dropped out? Does Phoenix just become another winning scenario game, with lots of different versions running side by side, with new games being created as people demand them?

From my point of view, if you restart Phoenix now, then you are opening the floodgates to people always demanding a restart, when thing do not go exactly as they want. Phoenix, as it stands, is a lumbering behemoth plodding its way slowly forward, leaving behind it a trail of decimated ships, pounded starbases, exploded planets, and creaking affiliations - but, I still love it the way it is, and its 20 years of history make it something quite special.

So, perhaps a better question would be, how to get more players to join and to keep playing the game, while still being a viable business that will last the test of time?

We have been trying. New players now have somewhere to go where nobody is continuously telling them "Get off my land." That has helped, a lot. The affiliations that are growing, such as AFT and GCE, are concentrated largely in Corewards. It gives new players a chance to find their feet out of the stomping grounds.

The key seems to be to grow slowly, nurturing new players and keep them playing until they are hooked.
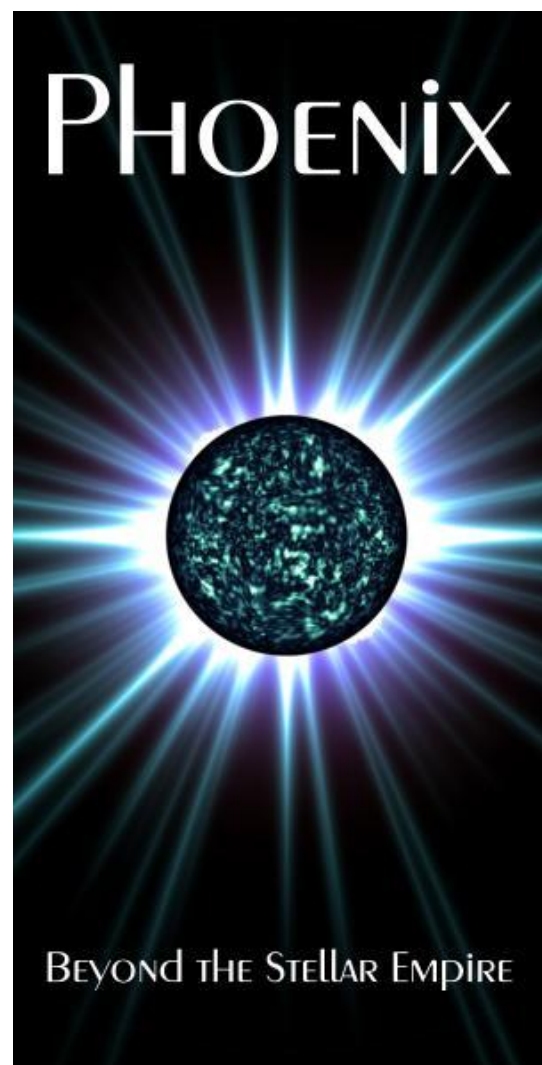
Are YOU getting the full picture??

PlayByMail.Net on Facebook

We're not looking for "likes."

COME CHECK US OUT

Were looking for YOU!

"Because you know that's not the whole picture."

USAK is a Diplomacy Judge, a play by email Diplomacy game server run by ASCII King Games. This is the site where you can get maps, enter orders and learn more about using the server.

The website is an additional front end for a play by email game server - the USAK Diplomacy Judge. USAK runs the latest stable version of the Judge, a PBEM server application with over 20 years of history.

The judge keeper, Chris Babcock, writes the scripts that power this site. He uses the CRM114 scripting language because it is cool enough to make Internet standards and best practices almost fun.

http://usak.asciiking.com/

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Diplomacy-on-USAK/328122573511

Dispatches from Planet Zynga

What the PBM-Likes Can Teach Us

By: Bernd Jaehnigen

With all our collective hand-wringing over the pending demise of PBM gaming, one might be surprised at the amount of PBM-like gaming going on. Traditional postal gaming is certainly in decline. The players who actually prefer filling out turn sheets and anxiously poring over printouts every two weeks are dwindling, and the moderators who even offer the paper option are few and far between. These days there is broad agreement that PBM gaming includes those games which transmit turns via email or web.

But hark - there are already games (and moderators!) who live in that space!

One of the big ones is a controversial company called Zynga. They offer hundreds of games via web, phone, and Facebook, and a fair number of them could be described as PBM-likes. Mafia Wars is a game in which players run an organized crime operation. They stake out turf, demand protection money from local businesses, assemble weapons, run hits on other gangs, and over time build their reputation and holdings. Sounds a lot like the venerable It's a Crime! game currently still offered by KJC Games.

Mafia Wars is far simpler -- it doesn't need a rulebook, there is nothing like It's A Crime's online order editor, and the number of decisions available to players is very limited. the interactions between gangs only happen within a small area of game-play. A player can in fact play entirely without interaction with others, though Zynga has put in energetic enticements to encourage social play. For us PBM hobbyists, a bare-bones game like Mafia Wars would be meager fare indeed.

But, while MW brings little to the PBM world in terms of gameplay, it does present a powerful example of how a PBM-like can take over the world. Mafia Wars has earned many millions of dollars to date, and continues to rack up the clams. Ironically (or perhaps non-ironically), Zynga was taken to court over allegations that it had used its market muscle to intimidate and steal the game (and the market space) from an earlier competitor. That case was settled -- for millions. These numbers dwarf the entire classic PBM industry we all know and love, and that's just one of Zynga's games. And it is kinda, sorta close to a PBM game.

How do they do it? I will review some of the ways they have succeeded, and which open up possibilities for *real* PBM games.

One way is that they build a social marketing element into the fabric of the game. Some of the in-game achievements can only be earned (or can be earned much more quickly) by building the network of friends you have who play the game. This encourages people to get their friends to

play, or at least to sign up. The value of this form of viral marketing is staggering, and the cost to them is virtually nil. Our PBM industry could mimic this by offering free setups, free turns, and other goodies to those who sign their buddies up. Doubtless some moderators already do this, but I haven't seen much of it.

Another is that they offer incremental rewards for continuing play. If you ignore your position for too long, you will miss opportunities. But if you check in, say, during your office conference calls or while commuting on the train, you can respond quickly. This fosters ongoing involvement in the game and builds player loyalty, especially as their in-game presence grows. I have seen some PBM moderators offer subscription models such that you can play a number of their games in parallel or play high turn-around games without breaking the bank -- all to help keep players interested and engaged.

Zynga presents a simple graphic user interface that any layman can understand. Most PBM games have a level of complexity that makes dumb interfaces difficult to implement, though some moderators are making steps in this direction. Cluster Wars, for instance, has a comprehensive turn-viewer and order-writer tool that -- compared to the old paper printout days -- is a huge leap forward in PBM player power. But it could go much further -- by using graphical dashboards and maps to show the turn, for instance, or by letting players use click-and-drag or scroll-bars to put their orders together.

Mafia Wars (and it's ilk) is generally free to play, with an option for people to leapfrog ahead if they pay for in-game concessions. While many of us might scoff at the notion

that players should be allowed to buy their way into a good position, there is a long history of PBM games doing exactly that. Perhaps more to the point, here, Zynga has lowered the barrier to entry. Gamers who will spend $60 on computer or board games (or $15 a month on World of Warcraft) frequently shake their heads at the idea of paying a fee every turn. So PBM moderators should look at offering free entry-level variants, pay-to-accelerate options, and flat subscription models. In an era where so many gaming options are available for free, it is hard to convince people to turn over their shekels for actual content.

MW can be played on modern platforms, such as Facebook, tablets, and smart phones. This is actually key to the future of all gaming, and should be foremost in our minds as we contemplate creating new PBM games. The PBM industry was born in the 70s as wargamers searched for ways to connect and play. Rick Loomis noted the many "player seeking opponents" ads in the back of The General (Avalon Hill's house organ), saw a niche to be filled, and gave birth to this great hobby. Similarly, we should take note of the vigorous game-play going on out there, especially what younger players are doing. There is fertile ground there. If the kids are using iPhones and want to check their game throughout the day, make games that DO that.

Very recently, the venerable geek site Slashdot asked its readers what kinds of computer games they play these days, old or new. Here is one notable reply:

Quote: I'm playing Wordfeud (an online game of Scrabble), I like it because of its pace - I have 72 [hours] to complete a move, so I can take my time. The game allows me to play with multiple

opponents simultaneously; I've made some good friends and we keep playing for several years now. This game brings people together, if you let it.

If anyone could recommend a similar, turn-based, online multiplayer game for Android - I'd greatly appreciate it.

This should be seen as a call to action by every PBM moderator out there. This computer gamer is basically enumerating some of the benefits of PBM gaming and is asking -- ASKING! -- for help in finding similar gaming experiences.

Beyond Zynga, many other game companies are sensing this desire for "turn-based, online multiplayer games". The old computer game Master of Orion (a 4X classic) has been ported to the iPad under the name Starbase Orion. It's basically the same game, but with much improved support for multiplayer action. It's got such a fan base that they charge $8 to download it -- a high price in the app-store market.

BoardGameGeek, as comprehensive as it is, has an entry for Warp War, which was a simple but well-designed "micro game" published by Metagaming in the 80s. I had always thought it would be a straightforward port to PBM play. Well lo and behold, there is an active player base, including some who are working on building that. It would be a PBM experience not unlike the Far Horizons demo we played out in the early days of PlayByMail.net. For that and a number of other games (that I've found so far), there are turn-by-turn records of games being played in those forums, which serve as both a platform for play and an archive for posterity.

These examples show that there is a market for the PBM experience, even if the players

don't know about us. The market of PBM-likes in fact dwarfs today's market for classic PBM. As our own Rick McDowell wrote in [Suspense & Decision #1](), *"A breakthrough design in a totally new genre or an existing genre presented completely differently with lots of hooks could be big for the whole field by bringing new attention."* If someone manages to combine the marketing savvy of Zynga with the multi-platform hooks of the tablet/Smartphone age and the awesome wonders of content and game design already created in the classic PBM world, we could all see a rebirth of this beloved industry.

SPECIAL BONUS FOR ISSUE # 4 - The Introductory Rules for Rogue Space!

ROGUE SPACE-The Game Philosophy
Listen; there's a hell of a good universe next door: let's go. –e.e. cummings

What do I need to play?
These rules, friends, paper, pencils, 6 sided dice (known as d6) and imagination.

CREATE YOUR CHARACTER
Your Rogue Space Character is defined by his attributes. These attributes represent your characters bonus to try things and they are collectively known by the short hand **F.A.S.E.R.**

THE ATTRIBUTES: (F.A.S.E.R.)
- **Fighting**-to do with attacking and defending physical challenges or challengers
- **Acquiring-** to do with getting and finding, or hiding and losing something or someone
- **Scientific**- to do with figuring out puzzles, problem solving, logically solving issues
- **Empathy**-to do with interacting with people, influencing people, psychic abilities, mental stress, attacks, or defense
- **Repairing**-to do with fixing broken things, upgrading them, jury rigging, making or breaking mechanical objects

To generate randomly, roll 2d6 for each Attribute and consult the table below

2d6 Roll	ATR #
2 or 3	-2
4 or 5	-1
6 or 7	0
8 or 9	+1
10 or 11	+2
12	+3

To create your character using a point pool, divide 3 points among your 5 attributes. You may make one attribute -1 in order to add +1 to another attribute. No attribute may be more than +3 at the end of attribute generation.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPE

Archetypes are used to define the type of character you are playing and how they would react to problems. Think of it in terms of how each archetype might react to the problem of a locked door. **The Soldier** will try to smash it down. **The Scoundrel** will try to see if they can pick the lock. **The Technician** would try to find out more about the type of lock, and spend time developing a plan. Keep those differences in mind when you pick an archetype. These are not classes! Any "class" or professions could be any archetype: a 'Soldier' merchant, Technician entertainer, or Scoundrel pilot!

- **Soldier**: The combative and physical character.+1 to Fighting Attribute-starts with 2d6+3 Hit Points

- **Scoundrel**: The sneaky, scoundrel, self important character.+1 to Acquiring Attribute or Empathy Attribute. Starts with 2d6 Hit Points.

- **Technician**: Scientific, Technical, or engineering minded character. Add +1 to your Scientific Attribute or your Repairing Attribute. Starts with 1d6+2 Hit Points

Hit Points

Each Archetype starts with a Hit Point total. This represents how much damage the character can take before going unconscious. As a character takes damage, it is subtracted from a character's Hit Points. A score of 0 means you are unconscious and out of the fight. Negative Hit Points mean you died. Damage from one attack that takes you from positive into negative Hit Points are stopped at zero. A following attack doing damage that takes you into negative hit points(HP) kills your character.

Movement

Movement in a 5 second turn is equal to 5' for each HP the character currently has.

Luck (OPTIONAL)

This gives a character one re-roll of the dice on a failed attempt per game session equal to their characters level. Most characters in Rogue Space would have a Luck of 1. Bad luck is a negative score of -1 meaning one success is turned into a failure at referees discretion. Robots, Computers, A.I. Tanks, Spaceships, and the like do not have a Luck attribute….unless you want them to of course!

Increasing Levels, (OPTIONAL)

If you wish to have characters advance in levels, they need to complete and survive 3 adventures to gain 1 point which they may use to either increase an attribute by one OR increase their hit point total by one.

Psionics (OPTIONAL)

A player or opponent with an Empathy Attribute of 1 or more may have and use Psionic or mental powers. In general a psychic character should have one power. It can be used UNTIL the psychic fails a roll to use it, then the player must get a nights rest before trying again to use it again. Only sentient players may have Psionics…unless androids really do dream of electric sheep.

- **Astral Projection**-your psychic spirit leaves your body to explore like a ghost. Your body may still be damaged but the astral projection can do nothing more than observe without being observed…maybe. Astral projection becomes permanent if characters body is killed.

- **Clairvoyance**-the ability to gain information about an object, person, location or physical event through psychic means

- **Psychic** blast-do physical wounds to an object or person equal to your Empathy Attribute

- **Psychic shield**-the ability to block psionic attacks or psionic attempts against your mind.

- **Psychic Vampire**-the ability to try to use ONE TIME any psychic power that was just used against you, whether successful or not.

- **Pyrokinesis**-the ability to create fires with your mind.

- **Telekinesis**-the ability to move objects with your mind.

- **Telepath**-the ability read minds and send thoughts.

Dice and Doing Things: Target Tests

If an action's success is in doubt, a roll of two six sided dice is required. This is notated as 2d6. The player or opponent must announce what they are trying to do and rolls 2d6. If the roll is against an object, person, or problem that is *NOT ACTIVELY* resisting, a **TARGET NUMBER** is given by the referee. Both dice are rolled and summed. The referee will decide what (if any) Attribute should be added to make the attempt. If the total of the summed dice + the attribute modifier is equal to or more than the target number given by the referee, the attempt is a success. If not, the attempt fails. Target Tests are frequently used for tracking, climbing, swimming, spotting hidden objects, figuring out problems, and fixing broken things.

Determining Target Numbers

A Target Number is a value representing how hard the task is to accomplish successfully. The character's goal is to equal or exceed that number. While there is no definitive formula to determine difficulty, a referee will need to use their own judgment based on the situation. Walking on a beam is easy, doing so under fire, while wounded with the threat of warp core implosion in T minus 20 seconds is a different story. Target numbers reflect that difference. Below is a basic chart to help you.

Target #	Difficulty
5	Easy
7	Average
9	Hard
11	Heroic
13	Legendary

Dice and Doing Things: Competitive Tests

If an action's success is in doubt, a roll of two six sided dice is required. This is notated as 2d6. If the roll is against an object, person, or problem that is *ACTIVELY* resisting, a Competitive Test is used by the referee. The player and opponent must announce what they are trying to do and EACH rolls 2d6. Each player sums the total of his own dice roll.

The referee will decide what (if any) Attribute should be added to make the attempt. The total of each players summed dice score + the attribute modifier is compared to one another. The person or side with the highest total wins the contest and results are applied as necessary. In the event of a tie score, nothing happens and the contest continues next turn. Competitive Tests are frequently used for most combat, evading pursuers, out maneuvering vehicles, influencing people, and making bargains.

Initiative

In general the players should go first unless there is some reason (ambush, surprise, asleep) they should not. Turn order is determined by each player rolling 2d6 and adding his current HP total. Highest total acts first.

Combat

Combat is a competitive test between an attacker and a defender. Whether they are in starships, hover cycles, or in hand to hand combat,-one person is trying to hurt someone who does not want to be hurt. This contest is resolved per the Competitive Test rules. In general if the attacker's total is higher than the defender's total, the defender will take damage. If the defender's total is higher than the attacker's, the defender takes no damage as the attacker missed.

Range and other Combat Modifiers (OPTION)

Most combat is done while maneuvering, or at a distance. Range, cover and lighting can all affect combat.. While the following is not a comprehensive list of all situations that will arise, it may help give you guidance. Subtract or add the numbers given from the sum rolled on two dice (2d6) in the attempt by the attacker or the defender.

ATK Modifier	DEF Range		Def Modifier	Range
+1	Point Blank		+2	75% Cover
0	Close Range		+1	50% Cover
-1	Med Range		0	25% Cover
-2	Long Range		0	No Cover
-3	Xtreme Range		+2	Night/darkness
+1/ turn	Aiming		Fighting ATR	Dodging

Damage and Armor Protection

Damage is dependent on the weapon being used. Weapon damage is classified as Light, Medium Heavy and Extra Heavy. In short hand notation these are: L, M, V, and X. All hand weapons are rated in this scale. The damage caused by a weapon is removed from a defender's Hit Points. This damage is modified by the armor or protection worn by the defender.

Armor or protection is also rated using the same scale L,M,V, or X. The protection number given is SUBTRACTED from the damage done by the weapon used in the attack. Below is a quick reference chart for referencing damage by class, and armor by class.

Dmg. Rating	HP Damage	Armor Rating	Protection
Light (L)	2d6 use lowest	Light	-1
Medium (M)	1d6	Medium	-2
Heavy (V)	2d6 use highest	Heavy	-4
Extra Heavy (X)	2d6	Extra Heavy	-6

EXAMPLE: *Victus Chao is wearing a light ballistic cloth jacket when he is shot by a nefarious bounty hunter. The hunter's gun does M damage, and Chao's armor is -1. So 1d6 is rolled and 3 is the result. 3-1 equals 2 Hit Points damage for Victus Chao.*

Non-Lethal Weapons

The effect of non-lethal is the same, causing Hit Points of damage with the goal of knocking the target unconscious, The difference is damage caused by Non-Lethal weapons after the target is unconscious has no further effect and will not kill the target.

Healing Hit Points

Once you're damaged you need to get fixed up. Below is a rough guide to getting better: A med kit restores 1 HP instantly if used by someone properly. Regular rest and light duty will heal 1 hit point every 4 days. Sickbay will restore 1 hit point every 2 days A hospital or specialist facility will restore 1 HP every day.

Listen; there's a hell of a good universe next door: let's go. –e.e. cummings

Weapons: Below are a few to get you started

RANGED Weapon	Damage		Armor Type	Protection
Bow	L		Leather*	L(-1)*
Cross Bow	M		Ballistic Cloth	L(-1)
Pistol	L		Flak Vest	M(-2)
Sub Machine Gun	M		Vacc Suit	M(-2)
Rifle	V		Chain Mail*	M(-2)*
Laser Rifle	V		Military Field	V(-4)
Laser Pistol	M		Scale Mail*	V(-4)*
MELEE Weapons	DAMAGE		Heavy combat	X(-6)
Knife	L		Plate Mail*	X(-6)*
Axe	L		* value 0 vs. modern weapons	
Sword	M			
Spear	M		Explosives	Damage
Club	M		Grenade	V
Hammer/ Mace	M		Rkt Prop Gren.	X
Whip	L		Missile	X

Looking for Adventure? Roll on the charts below to generate some ideas

Thing	2d6 Roll		Person	2d6 Roll
Military Secret	2		Planet Governor	2
Science Experiment	3		Military Leader	3
Genetic Experiment	4		Famous Star	4
Illicit Cargo	5		CEO	5
A Vehicle	6		Faction Leader	6
Cargo	7		Missing Person	7
Computer or A.I.	8		Religious Leader	8
Military Weapons	9		Alien Life Form	9
Black Ops Tech	10		Mutant	10
Artifact	11		Genetic Experiment	11
Ancient Tech	12		Ancient Alien	12

Explore links, get free downloads and to purchase the full rules visit

ROGUESPACERPG.BLOGSPOT.COM
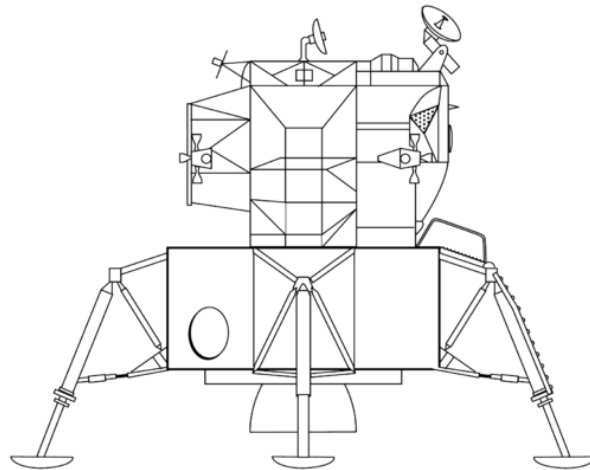
Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail

The Fallen Empires Forum

http://fallenempires.freeforums.org/

This is a fairly new forum, one created this year (2014). It's not even one full month old, as of the point in time that I write this.

As of February 24th, 2014, the Fallen Empires forum lists a total of 42 topics and a total of 53 posts.

Thus, this moon colony of play by mail gaming is of very recent vintage. Life is present here, and there's no sign of any spambot invasion, which bodes well for this forum's near term growth. At only 15 registered forum members, though, is this colony of gamers large enough, yet, to sustain itself going forward?

It's way too early in this forum's history to draw any definitive conclusions. The fact that its ranks are populated by a number of veteran gamers is a mark in its favor, though. The most recent posting on this forum was dated February 22, 2014.

A second landing at the **Fallen Empires PBE Facebook page** revealed a grand total of 38 likes, as of February 24th, 2013. The most recent posting on this Facebook page was dated January 15, 2014. The rate of posting on this Facebook page has been infrequent, at best, over the last several months.

CONCLUSION: Fresh signs of life, but population numbers remain dangerously low.
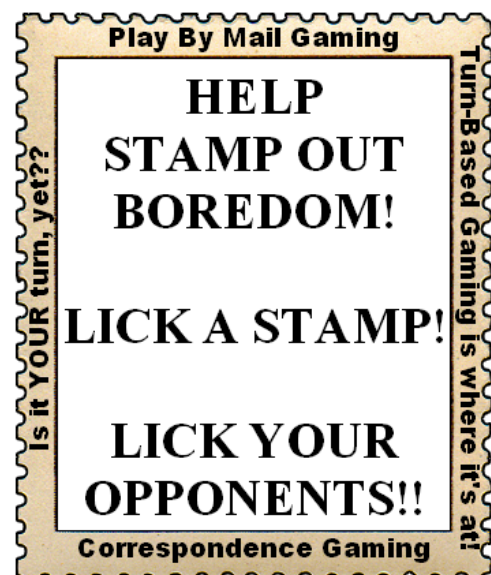
Managing editor hard at work.

OlyWiki

Containing information about

Olympia Game 4

Olympia: The Age of Gods

and future revisions and games
run with the Olympia codebase.

Machiavelli - http://ustp.asciiking.com

It's Diplomacy with the gloves off.

Playing your first game of Machiavelli
A beginners visual guide

By: Sergio Lidsell

This article is a step-by-step tutorial on how you setup and get going playing the first two years of the Balance of Power scenario of Machiavelli. As there are two versions of Machiavelli (Classic printed 1977, 1980 and 1983, and the 2nd edition printed 1995), I have chosen to focus on the Classic game, and added notes where the two versions differ.

The games comes in a Basic and Advanced version. The Basic game, especially the 2nd edition version, is very similar to Diplomacy - and is an interesting challenge to players accustomed to the stalemate lines and given outcomes of Diplomacy. In (advanced) Machiavelli, you look the loser, and still may prevail and solo win. Some dislike the randomness of famine, plague, and bribe events, but that is what gives Machiavelli the richness that makes it so challenging and riveting.

| CLASSIC MACH BOX FRONT | 2ND EDITION MACH BOX FRONT |

Map differences between the editions

As the 2nd edition is more readily accessible, I'll begin with a quick description of map-board differences. Borders differ for some sea areas, Marseille/Avignon and Croatia/Carniola. Some areas on the Classic map have been subsumed into other areas on the 2nd edition map. The 2nd edition rules for Venice and straits differ, and you are allowed to move armies between Sardinia and Corsica, and between Messina and Otranto (which is more useful). I have also crossed out anchors (see notes on set up map) that are of no use, as there is no official scenario including them.

2ND EDITION MACH MAP COMPARED WITH CLASSIC MACH MAP
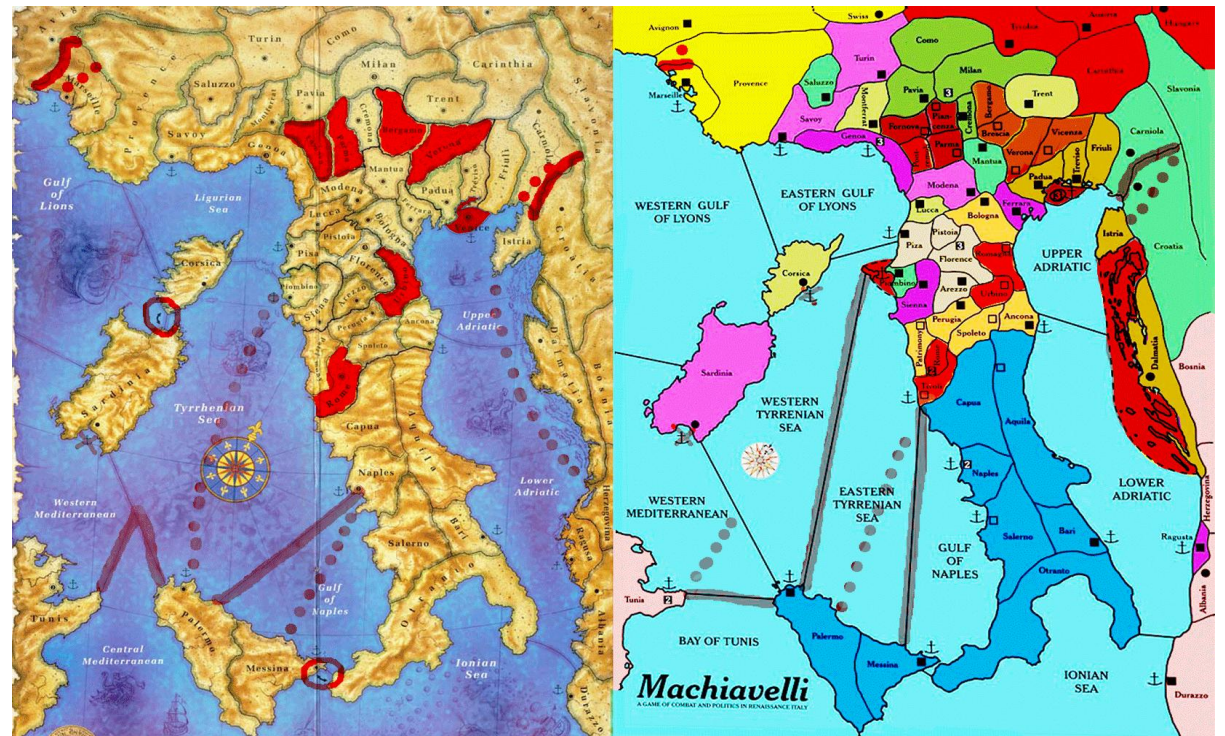
1 Getting started – Setup

The standard game is the eight player Balance of Power scenario. It is setup, as shown in the picture, below: fat colored lines show the starting home powers borders, unit and flag counter indicate controlled areas, black/yellow/red counters are autonomous garrisons. The strongest power is Venice, and the weakest is usually Austria. Milan and the Papacy seem fairly strong, but their position in the middle of four other powers make them weak/difficult to play. France is, surprisingly, often the second best power to play, due to its corner position, easy access to a couple of neutral centers, and the fact that it is often "forgotten" while the other powers slug it out. It is recommended that powers are selected by random draw, or rotated tournament style for longer play sessions.

Starting money (advanced game)

If you wish to play with the advanced rules, see the section on Advanced rules for computation of starting money. *For the purposes of my sample advanced game, the powers will have the following starting money: Austria 1 ducat, Florence 3d, France 0d, Milan 9d (lucky strike), Naples 5d, Papacy 4d, Turks 4d, Venice 10d (yes, all the time and this is why Venice often wins).* (Useful: http://www.random.org/dice/.)

A note on the phase names and die short-hand

To make it easier to follow the flow of the game, some phases have more descriptive names than in the original rules. I have also added some phases that, hopefully, make it easier to follow the order of execution of some rules.

1d6 = roll 1 six-sided die, 2d6 = roll 2 six-sided dice.

Province ownership
counter. A.k.a.
Control marker.

Fortified
city. Army
can convert
to garrison
or vice versa.

PROVINCE
(LAND AREA)

Autonomous
garrison. Holds
until eliminated.

SEA AREA

Unfortified
city. NO
garrisons.

Fleet counter. Special
units use the same.
That is why the pre-1995
counters were numbered.

Garrison
counter

Colored borders
indicates extent
of home country
colors on the
Classic map.
No colors on
1995 map.

Army counter. Special
units use the same.
That is why the pre-1995
counters were numbered.

Fortress: none are
used. All removed
in the 1995 edition.

An anchor by a fortress
is only used if fortressess
are in play. Removed in
the 1995 edition.

An anchor indicates you
can build fleets in this
province or convert a
fleet to a garrison or
vice versa in the city.

MAJOR CITY 2

MACHIAVELLI 1 GAME MAP, vers. II
By Sergio Lidsell. Based on Fernando Blesa's v. I map.
Permission to copy for non-profit purposes granted.
Machiavelli and Avalon Hill Game Company are trademarks,
of Hasbro Inc., Baltimore, Maryland, all rights reserved.

Revised Aug 1 and Dec 17, 2001

BALANCE OF POWER SETUP

Austria (A): A-Austria, Carinthia, A-Hungary, A-Tyrolea
France (F/Fr): A-Avignon, F-Marseille, Provence, A-Swiss
Florence (L/Fl): A-Arezzo, A-Florence, F-Pisa, Pistoia
Milan (M/I) Como, A-Cremona, Fornova, A-Milan, Parma, A-Pavia
Naples (N) Aquila, A-Bari, Capua, A-Messina, F-Naples, Otranto, F-Palermo, Salerno
Papacy (P): F-Ancona, A-Bologna, Patrimony, A-Perugia, A-Rome, Spoleto, Urbino
Turks (T): A-Albania, Bosnia, F-Durazzo, Herzegovina, F-Tunis
Venice (V): Bergamo, F-Dalmatia, Friuli, Istria, A-Padua, G-Venice, A-Verona. Classic Mach also A-Verona. 2nd edition also A-Treviso.
Autonomous: G-Ferrara, G-Genoa, G-Lucca, G-Mantua, G-Modena, G-Montferrat, G-Piombino, G-Ragusa G-Saluzzo, G-Savoy, G-Siena, G-Trent. 2nd edition also G-Turin.

2 Your first moves

Your first decision is whether to play the Basic game or not. I'll run you through an Advanced game, with the "disasters" options. But, if you prefer to play the Basic game, ignore the advanced game phases. The Basic game is more similar to Diplomacy.

There are three turns, called seasons or campaigns, in each game year: Spring, Summer and Autumn.

As the map is small and easily cluttered, the following counter placement methods are suggested. Control evaluation is used with Classic Mach and 2nd ed. conquest rules.

The Spring 1454 Turn

PLAYER NOTE: THE OFFICIAL TURN & PHASE ORDER

Famine Phase (optional rule)
Ignored in the first year. Famine occurs at the beginning of the spring turn, according to the rules, but later in this guide, you'll notice that I have combined famine and adjustments into a "winter turn" – the Income and Adjustments Turn.

Unit Adjustment Phase
Ignored in the first year, see setup. Adjustments occurs after famine, but I have rolled them into a combined famine and adjustments "winter turn" – the Income and Adjustments Turn – as is done in the online game, as it is rather practical.

Diplomacy/Negotiation Phase

Has to be concluded before movement in FtF games. In online games, this rule cannot be upheld, so negotiations are, for all purposes, continuous.

Order Writing Phase

All players **secretly** write down their **secret** movement orders, and in advanced games, also their secret expenditure orders !

Advanced game: you may write orders for units you attempt to buy (bribes H and K).

For an explanation of expenditure orders, see "Expenses" in the "Advanced rules section".

Basics of movement: Armies can only enter provinces. Fleets can enter coastal provinces and sea areas. Garrisons can only occupy Fortified Cities. Only one unit may be present in any area or city. In provinces containing a fortified city, two units may be present: a garrison and either an army or, if the city has an anchor symbol, a fleet.

The movement order types are: move/advance into another area (M/A/-), besiege garrison (B), hold/no move/no order (H), support another unit's move (S), transport/convoy army by (chain of) fleet(s) into another area (T), remove/disband unit (O), convert army or fleet to garrison or vice versa (C/=), lift siege/end siege (L).

The following orders are permitted for each unit type: Garrison CHOS; Army BCHLMOS, Fleet BCHLMOST.

TECH NOTE: THE LIFT SIEGE ORDER

In Classic Mach, an army or fleet that has begun a siege cannot move off, without ordering Lift siege (L). Thus, once a siege has begun, the unit is stuck in that province for one additional season. In the online community, this rule has been ignored, and a besieging unit is allowed to use another order. The lift siege rule has been removed in the 2nd edition Mach rules.

The move/advance order. Control evaluation only for Classic Mach.
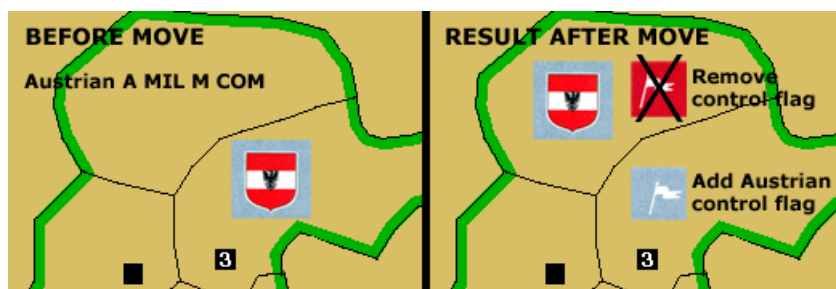
The first season besiege order. Notice that both a garrison and an army (or a fleet in case of a port city) are allowed in the same province.
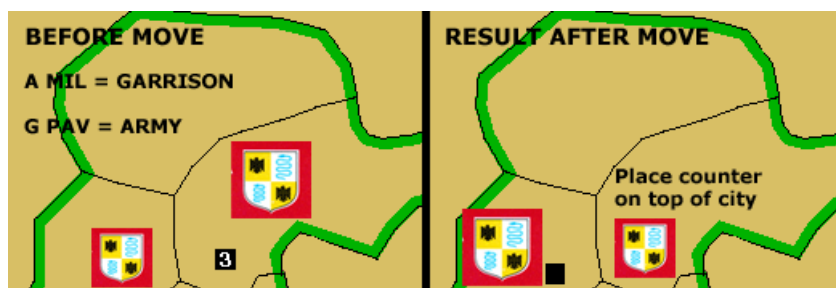

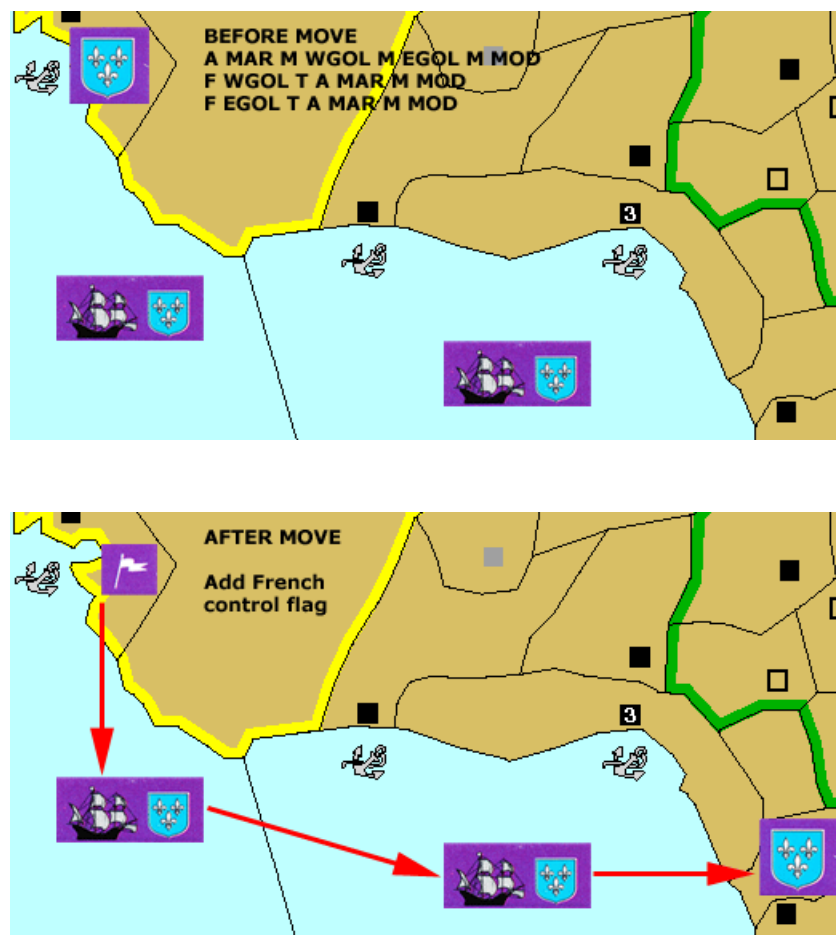The second season siege order.

The lift siege order.

The convert order (example of a garrison and an army converting).

The disband order. Control evaluation only for Classic Mach.

The convoy order (example of a multi-fleet convoy). Control evaluation only for Classic Mach.

The support order will be shown, later, with conflict resolution examples.

The hold order is not shown, as there is no point.

Expenditures Resolution Phase – advanced game

a) Reveal expenditures A through K: change ownership of units, remove famine and add/remove rebellion units, where applicable. Now you also transfer/receive money to/from other players.
b) Perform assassination attempts (expenditure L).

Classic Mach only: add and remove control markers, where necessary.

Movement Phase (movement order resolution)

a) Reveal orders.
b) Read orders aloud, and resolve conflicts with other players (I usually perform this in the order FIAVTNPL, one order at a time.) Orders will end in either an advance, bounce, or retreat.
c) Add a marker (I use ducats) in any area where units have bounced, as the area will be unavailable for retreats. Turn a unit that must retreat upside down.

Classic Mach only: add and remove control markers, where necessary. Remove control markers from any province where garrison and army or fleet are from different powers.

Movement resolution is explained in Appendix 1.

Retreat Phase

Usually retreats can be done immediately after order resolution, but sometimes, there is the possibility that more than one unit may retreat to the same area. In that case, you have to write down **secret retreat orders** for retreating **armies or fleets**. Rebellion units (advanced game) do not support retreats.

Classic Mach: only move or disband orders are allowed. (Read tech note below!)

2nd Edition Mach: only move, disband, and convert to garrison orders are allowed.

TECH NOTE: RETREAT ORDERING

Classic Mach: A retreating army or fleet that cannot be ordered to convert into garrison, BUT is automatically forced to retreat into a garrison if there is no unoccupied area to retreat to and if the player has not ordered a disband!

2nd Edition Mach: A retreating army or fleet may be ordered to convert into garrison, BUT is automatically forced to retreat into a city if no orders are given and there is no unoccupied area to retreat to!

Reveal retreat orders. Read them aloud, and resolve conflicts with other players (I usually perform this in the order FIAVTNPL one order at a time.) Orders will end in either a move or an elimination, if the unit is bounced.

If two or more units retreat to the same area, just stack the units in that area.

Classic Mach only: add and remove control markers, where necessary.

Unit and Control Marker Removal Phase

a) Garrisons cannot retreat and are eliminated, if they have been besieged for two seasons (indicated by an upside down counter).

b) Remove all units from areas with more than one army or fleet unit in it.

Example of a retreat into the same province. Province controlled by third party.

Example of a retreat into the same province. Province has garrison.

`Famine Resolution Phase – optional rule

Ignored in the first year.

TECH NOTE: FAMINE REMOVAL

Classic Mach: Technically, this is split in two steps – removal of units after retreats, and removal of famine markers before plague.

Player Elimination Phase – Classic Mach and 2nd Edition with conquest rule

The Summer 1454 Turn

Adds the Plague phase (see chapter 8, Optional rules), but there is no famine. The other phases are repeated, as instructed for Spring.

Plague Resolution Phase – optional rule

Roll dice and reference result tables. Remove any fleet, army, or garrison units present in plagued provinces – including autonomous units. For procedure see the famine example later on.

> **TIP**
>
> If possible avoid having too many units in provinces listed in the same row or column of the plague table. This does of course not make you safe, but at least you won't put all your eggs in the same basket…

Diplomacy/Negotiation Phase

Order Writing Phase

Expenditures resolution phase – advanced game

Movement Phase

Retreat Phase

Unit and Control Marker Removal Phase

Player Elimination Phase – Classic Mach and 2nd Edition with conquest rule

The Fall 1454 Turn

No Plague or Famine phase. Repeat the below, as instructed for Spring.

Diplomacy/Negotiation Phase

Order Writing Phase

Expenditures Resolution Phase – advanced game

Movement Phase

Retreat Phase

Unit and Control Marker Removal Phase

Player Elimination Phase – Classic Mach and 2nd Edition with conquest rule

The Winter 1454 Income and Adjustments Turn
Though, technically part of Spring, it is simpler to perform this as its own turn: a "winter season".

Famine Phase – optional rule
Famine (see chapter 8, Optional rules) affects income and adjustments.

> **TIP**
>
> If possible, avoid having too many units in provinces listed in the same row or column of the famine table, if you need to keep them in that province. If you are using the advanced rules, you can use an expense to remove the famine.

Province Control Phase – 2nd edition game only!
Add and remove control markers, where necessary. In Classic Mach, province control changes continuously, but in the 2nd Edition Mach, it only changes after fall, as in the Diplomacy game.

Count Eligible Cities Phase – basic game only!
Count all cities in provinces controlled by you, and record the total.

Income Phase – advanced game only!
Calculate the income from all your controlled provinces, and record the amount. Provinces containing rebellion units produce **no** income.

a) Fortified city controlled by you: 1 ducat if unbesieged, otherwise, no income.

b) Unfortified city controlled by you: 1 ducat.

c) Major city controlled by you: the amount noted in the symbol.

d) Province controlled by you: 1 ducat.

e) Sea area containing one of your fleets: 1 ducat.

f) Province with split control: the player owning the garrison, as per a) or c) above, and the player owning the fleet or army, as per d) above.

g) Variable income: see "Money and income" under the advanced rules section.
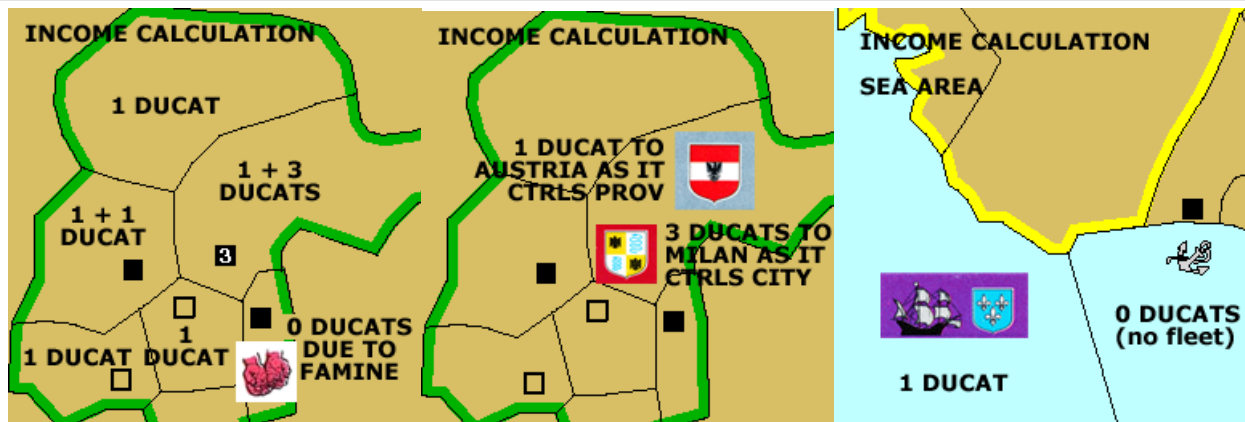
Unit Adjustment Phase (remove, maintain and build units)

You may only build in a home province containing a city. You may **not build in a famined province**. To build a fleet ,the city must also have an anchor. Garrisons can only be built in fortified cities. **Only one unit may be built,** in an eligible province.

a) All players *secretly* write down their *secret* orders.
b) Reveal orders.
c) Performed builds in the order they are read out. **Any of your orders, that conflict with any of your previous orders, will be invalid.**
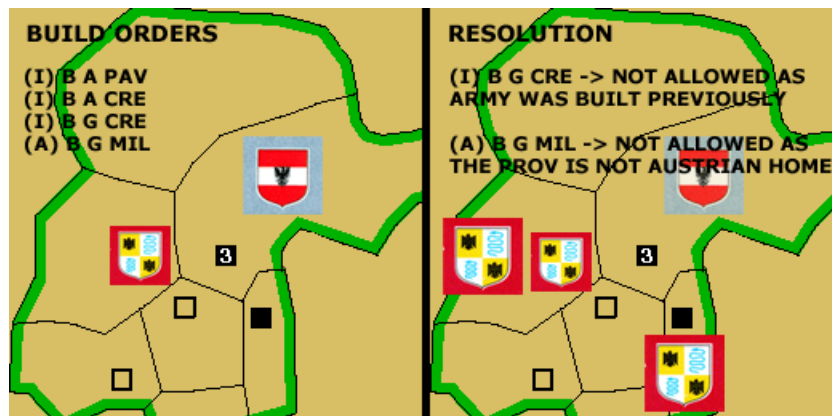
Special considerations for the Basic game:

a) You may only build new units, if you have more eligible cities than units. If you have less, you have to remove units.
b) E.g. Milan controls 5 cities and has 4 units, thus, it is allowed to build a unit in either Milan, Pavia, or Cremona.
c) E.g. The Papacy controls 7 cities and has 8 units, thus, it must remove one of its units.

Special considerations for the Advanced game:

a) **Units are paid for.** You may selectively ignore to pay a unit (it will be disbanded), to be able to build another unit **in a different province**.
b) E.g. Milan has 4 units and 16 ducats, thus, it is allowed to build a unit in either Milan, Pavia, or Cremona as it has 4 ducats left (=16-12), after maintenance.

a) E.g. The Papacy has 7 units and 22 ducats. It chooses to maintain only 6 units, and will, thus, have 4 ducats left (=22-18) after maintenance, that it may save or use to build another unit.

Special considerations for Venice:

a) *Classic Mach: only one unit (of any type) may be present in it at all times.*
b) *2nd Edition Mach: only one garrison or one fleet may be present in it at all times.*
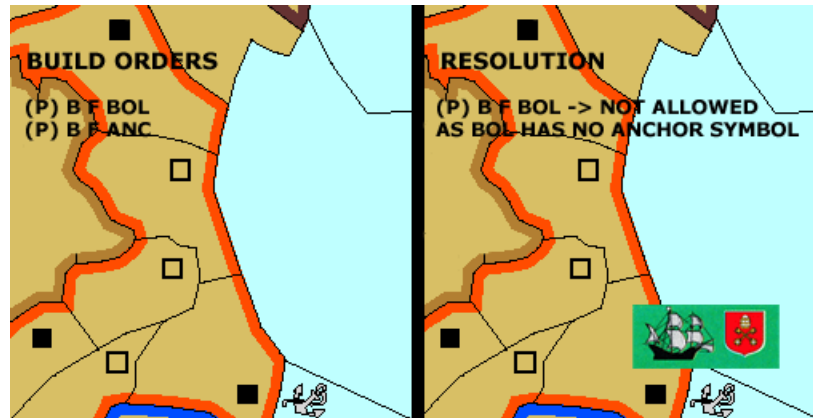
5 Into the second year: the Spring 1455 turn

Repeat the below, as instructed for Spring 1454. From this point on, the game proceeds as explained for S1455, U1454, F1454 and W1454.

Diplomacy/Negotiation Phase

Order Writing Phase

Expenditures resolution phase – advanced game

*Movement Phase*

Retreat Phase

Unit and Control Marker Removal Phase

Famine Resolution Phase – optional rule

Remove any fleet, army, or garrison units present in famine provinces – including autonomous units. Also, remove the famine counter.

Classic Mach only: add control markers, where necessary.

In this example, Milan is in famine at the end of spring, and the player has to eliminate both the army and garrison from it. Control flags are for clarity and Classic Mach.
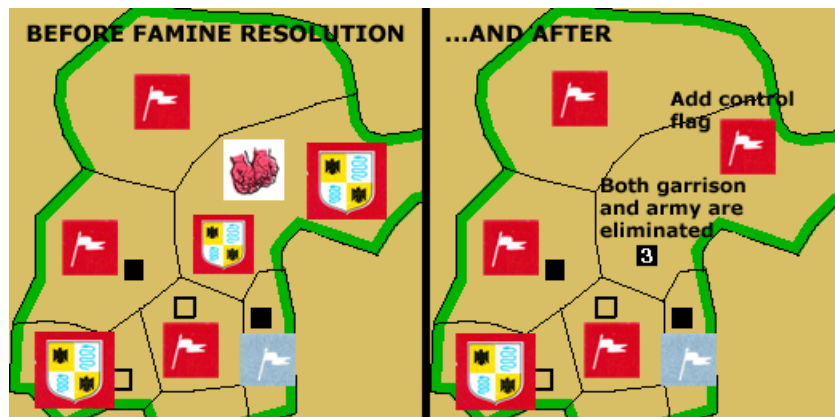
Same example, but with split province control.

Player Elimination Phase – Classic Mach and 2nd Edition with conquest rule

6 How to win

Various options are suggested in the rules. For Basic/shorter games, 12 cities, including all home country cities, are the recommended minimum. For advanced games, 15-18 cities and two home countries (not necessarily including your starting home) are recommended. For longer games, 23 cities and three home countries are suggested ("ultimate victory").

It is up to the players what conditions to set. I, myself, suggest "Italian unity": 23 cities and Rome city and province, and three home countries, including never losing your starting home.

7 Advanced rules

The following section adds detail about some of the advanced rules.

Money and income

Starting money at setup of the Balance of Power scenario

    1) Add -2 (yes, that is minus) ducats to Austria's and France's treasury.

1) Add 4 ducats to Milan's and Venice's treasury.
2) Add 0 ducats to Florence's and the Turks treasury.
3) Add 1 ducat to the Papacy's and Naples' treasury.
4) Roll 1d6 for each of AF. If they roll a one, remove one unit, and set the treasury to zero. If they roll 2-6, consult the table under "Calculating income" for gained ducats: subtract 2, and add the remainder to the treasury. *I recommend that the unit removal rule is ignored, as it disadvantages AF just too much!*
5) Roll 1d6 for each of IMNP. Consult the table under "Calculating variable income," and add that to the sum already in their treasury (steps 2-4 above).
6) Roll 1d6 twice for each of LV. Consult the table under "Calculating income," and add that to the sum already in their treasury (steps 2-4 above).

Calculating variable income

The variable income table for the Balance of Power scenario (use a 6-sided die):

Power:	roll	1	2	3	4	5	6
Austria	1 die	1	2	3	3	4	4
Florence	2 dice	1	2	3	3	4	5
France	1	1	2	3	4	5	6
Milan	1	2	3	3	4	4	5
Naples	1	1	2	2	3	3	4
Papacy	1	2	3	3	4	5	6
Turkey	1	1	2	3	4	5	6
Venice	2	2	3	3	4	4	5
City:							
Genoa	1	1	2	2	3	3	4

It is the player controlling Genoa city that gets the Genoa variable income.

TECH NOTE: GENOA VARIABLE INCOME

Classic Mach: That the income applies to the player controlling the city and not the province, and that there is no need to control both, is clarified (sort of) by the advanced game rule V.B.1.d Variable income, where it says that "…some individual major cities also have a variable income".

2nd Edition Mach: see rule 8.2.4 Variable income, where it is stated that "…some scenarios individual major cities also have a variable income."

Expenses

Order must state which province the expense is directed to and unit type, where applicable. Notice that 2nd edition expense abbreviations are used. You may only make four bribes/expenses (A-K) per season. In the 2nd edition, this limit has been removed, but as it gives undue advantage to a rich power (especially in the end game) I recommend that the Classic Mach rule is used,and that the 2nd edition is regarded as an optional rule.

Unit build and maintenance costs

All units cost 3 ducats to build or maintain. Special units (optional rule) have other costs.

Unit bribes

Bribes may only be directed into a province adjacent to one of your units (also see optional rules). Minimum amounts are noted below. Amounts may be increased in increments of 3 ducats. Bribes may not be directed against your own units.

If several players try to bribe the same unit, the highest "bidder" wins. **All other players lose their money!** Classic Mach tie rule: if bribes are tied all players lose their money. 2nd edition tie rule: if bribes are tied roll 1d6—highest roll wins. Personally I regard the 2nd edition tie rule as wrong and recommend that only the Classic Mach rule is used.

Counter-bribe (F): In multiples of 3 ducats. E.g. Austria pays 12d to disband Milanese A Como. If Milan pays 3d to counter the bribe Austria's bribe fails. Should Austria pay 15d, then Milan has to counter-bribe with 6d. And so on.

Disband autonomous garrison (G): 6 ducats per garrison. 12 ducats if major city garrison.

Buy autonomous garrison (H): 9 ducats per garrison. 18 ducats if major city garrison. Also write a movement order for this unit in case your bribe succeeds.

Convert garrison to autonomous (I): 9 ducats per garrison. 18 ducats if major city garrison.

Disband enemy unit (J): 12 ducats per A/F/G unit.

Buy enemy unit (K): 18 ducats per A/F/G unit. Also write a movement order for this unit in case your bribe succeeds. E.g. K A Mil 18d A Mil – Cre.

Other expenses

Famine relief (A): 3 ducats per province.

Pacify rebellion (B): 12 ducats per province.

Cause rebellion in conquered province (C): 9 ducats per province. The province cannot be a home province controlled by its owner.

Cause rebellion in home province (D): 15 ducats per province. If the province is a home province controlled by its owner.

You **may also give/loan money** to other players.

Assassins (expense E)

See official rules for explanation.

8 Optional rules

Disasters

Famine and plague are commonly called disasters. Resolve them by first rolling a 2d6 to determine the severity (2, 3 Good year—no disaster; 4, 6 Poor year, row only; 5, 7 Poor year, column only; 8-12 Bad year, row and column). Then proceed to the appropriate table and, if a

poor year, roll one 2d6 to get a list of affected provinces. If it was a bad year, you roll **two** 2d6. (In Mach2

Famine (recommended, suitable for both the basic and advanced game)

Notice that this is the Classic Mach table. (In Mach2, there are slightly less provinces, and the order is different.)

```
           2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9    10    11    12
 2: ----- ----- Prove Patri Moden ----- Corsi Ancon ----- ----- -----
 3: ----- Piomb ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- Tunis ----- ----- Paler
 4: Tivol ----- Otran Padua Swiss Cremo Pontr ----- Herze ----- -----
 5: Friul ----- Bolog Saler Veron Austr Milan Sienn ----- ----- Duraz
 6: Marse Ragus Vicen Carin Berga Pisto Spole ----- Pianc Hunga -----
 7: ----- Bari  Slavo Montf Urbin Forno ----- Como  Trent ----- -----
 8: Ferra ----- Rome  Pavia ----- ----- Arezz Bresc Saluz Alban Genoa
 9: ----- ----- Croat ----- Flore Turin Mantu Capua Trevi ----- -----
10: Savoy ----- Sardi ----- Parma Bosni Tyrol ----- Naple Romag Dalma
11: ----- ----- Venic ----- ----- ----- ----- Carni ----- Messi -----
12: ----- ----- ----- Pisa  Aquil Avign Lucca ----- Istri ----- -----
```

Plague (recommended, suitable for both the basic and advanced game)

Notice that this is the Classic Mach table. (In Mach2, there are slightly less provinces, and the order is different.)

```
           2     3     4     5     6     7     8     9    10    11    12
 2: Vicen Swiss ----- ----- Carni ----- ----- ----- ----- Montf Capua
 3: Pontr Bosni Slavo ----- ----- ----- Croat ----- Tivol Bari  Tyrol
 4: Savoy ----- ----- Friul ----- Rome  ----- Marse Pavia ----- -----
 5: ----- Saler Veron ----- Dalma Lucca Bolog Carin Prove ----- -----
 6: ----- ----- Turin Sienn Messi Padua Austr Ferra ----- ----- -----
 7: Paler ----- Genoa Alban Pisa  Tunis Avign Milan ----- ----- Sardi
 8: Duraz ----- Naple Moden Perug Cremo Venic Flore ----- ----- -----
 9: ----- Berga Ancon Parma ----- ----- ----- ----- Mantu Istri -----
10: Romag Hunga ----- Urbin ----- ----- ----- ----- Trevi ----- Como
11: Pianc Forno ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- Otran ----- Aquil Spole
12: Trent Herze ----- Bresc ----- ----- ----- Corsi ----- Patri Saluz
```

Special units (only suitable for the advanced game)

See official rules for explanation.

Optional bribery rule (fun to use, only suitable for the advanced game)

Bribes can be directed into any province.

Optional assassin rule (only suitable for the advanced game)

See official rules for explanation.

The money lenders (recommended, only suitable for the advanced game)

See official rules for explanation.

Strategic movement (2nd edition rule, suitable for Classic Mach and both the basic and advance game)

Player with the most cities go first. If same number of cities, the power with most units goes first. One army or fleet unit may move through an unlimited number of contiguous areas controlled by the moving player. Armies may **not** be convoyed.

Excommunication (2nd edition only, suitable for FtF play)

See official rules for explanation.

2nd edition conquest rule (2nd edition only, no point using it with Classic Mach)

See official rules for explanation.

The conquest rule 17.1§2 of the 2nd edition rule may be confusing, as you suddenly have to check for control at the end of each season, instead of only in the adjustment turn. This rule makes the 2nd edition more similar to Classic Mach.

9 Concluding remarks

Stalemate lines

Stalemate lines are possible in Basic Machiavelli, if no optional rules are used. If famine and plague are in play, stalemate lines get impossible. Especially with plague. Advanced Machiavelli has no stalemate lines, due to the use of bribes, although some positions are very difficult to break. An elite professional or citizens militia army or fleet in Venice would e.g. cost 48 ducats to disband.

Control changes in Classic Machiavelli

In Classic Mach, province control is evaluated, continuously.

Convoys

In Classic Mach, fleets in coastal provinces may convoy. In 2nd edition Mach, this is not allowed. I recommend that coastal convoy is made an option that you choose to use or not.

Straits

Some major differences between Classic and 2nd edition. In the 2nd edition, armies may move between Sardinia and Corsica, and between Messina and Otranto.

Messina strait. A fleet in Messina controls the Straits of Messina (between Messina and Otranto), and blocks enemy fleets from moving/convoying between the Gulf of Naples and the Ionian Sea. An army in Messina cannot prevent such a move.

Piombino strait (Classic Mach only): A fleet in Piombino controls the Channel of Piombino (between Pisa and Eastern Tyrrhenian Sea) and blocks enemy fleets from moving/convoying between the Pisa and ETS. An army in Piombino cannot prevent such a move.

TECH NOTE: FLEET MOVE TO MESSINA OR PIOMBINO

Classic Mach: a fleet moving to Piombino or Messina will block an enemy fleet from using the straits in the same turn.

2nd Edition Mach: the rules do not state what happens when a fleet moves to Messina at the same time as a fleet tries to move through the straits. I have made the assumption that the fleet must already be in Messina to block a move through the straits.

More information and automated play

More information can be found on the Machiavelli Boardgame Site (http://medlem.spray.se/machsite/). Games can be played on the USTP judge (http://ustp.asciiking.com/) and other "nJudges" (http://devel.diplom.org/openings/openings.html), or the Condottieri site (http://condottierigame.net/machiavelli/).

# Appendix 1 – some notes on movement resolution

All units have the same strength (optional special units may have double strength). Unsupported units entering the same area (sea or province) will bounce and remain in their starting area.

Retreating units have always a strength of one regardless if being a special unit or not. Retreating units may not be supported.

Thus to be able to advance you either need to enter an unoccupied area or order a unit to support the moving unit. The supporting units must be able to move to the same area to be able to the support. If the supporting unit is attacked or dislodged the support fails.

Example 1 – a power makes a supported attack

In this example Milan tries to regain Milan (province), while Austria attacks Cremona. Cremona is currently supporting Pavia-Milan. But as Cremona is supporting the unit attacking Milan, the Austrian attack on Cremona is void and cannot break the support. Pavia thus succeeds with 2:1 odds.
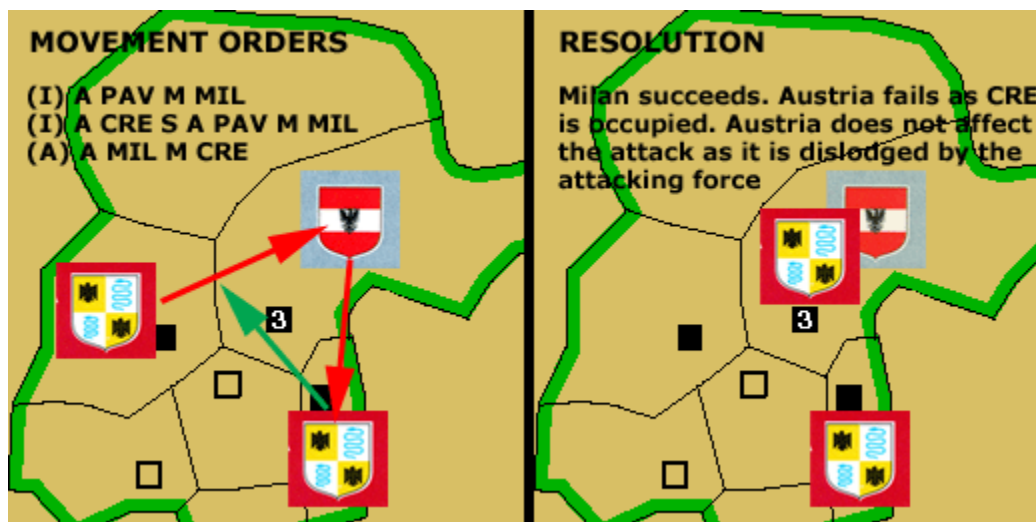
Example 2 – a power attacks a supporting unit

In this example Milan tries to regain Milan (province) supported by Cremona, while Austria attacks Cremona. As Austria in this case attacks Cremona with a superior force it will succeed in both breaking the support and moving into Cremona with 2:1 odds. (The attack on Milan resolves to 1:0.)
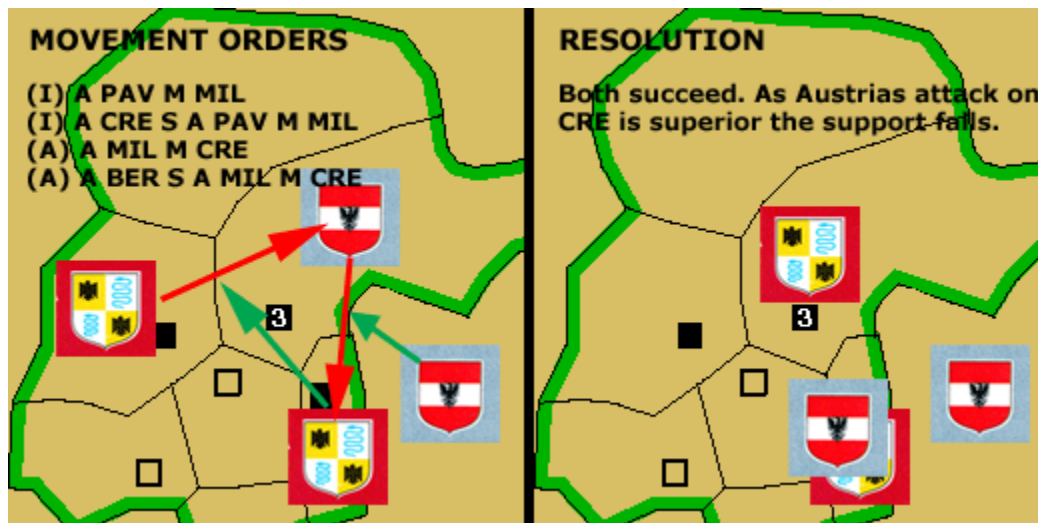

Example 3 – both powers attack supporting units

In this example Milan tries to regain Milan (province) supported by Cremona, while Austria tries to gain Cremona by letting Milan support Bergamo. The Pavia-Milan move will break Milans support of Bergamo to Cremona, and the Bergamo to Cremona move will break Cremonas support of Pavia. As this reduces the attacks to 1:1, both powers moves will fail.
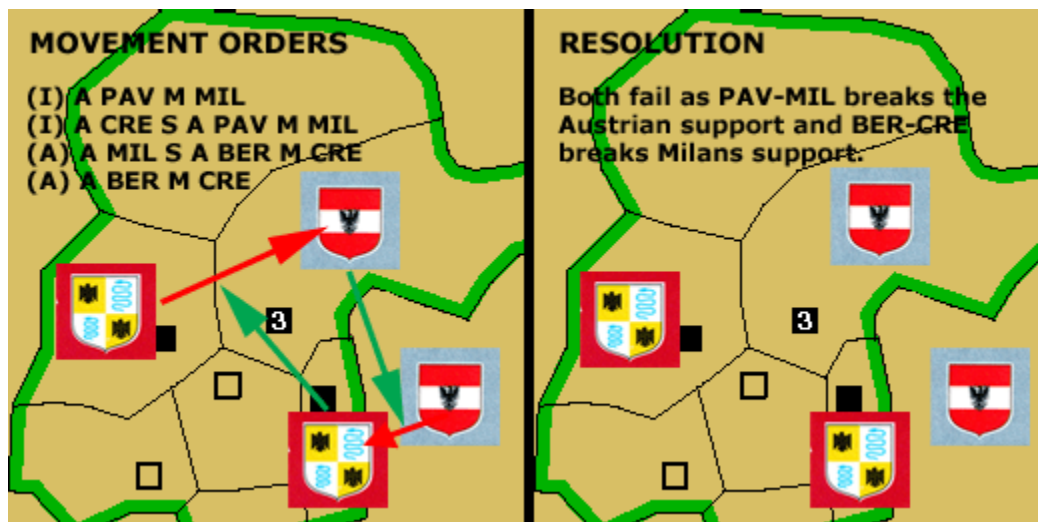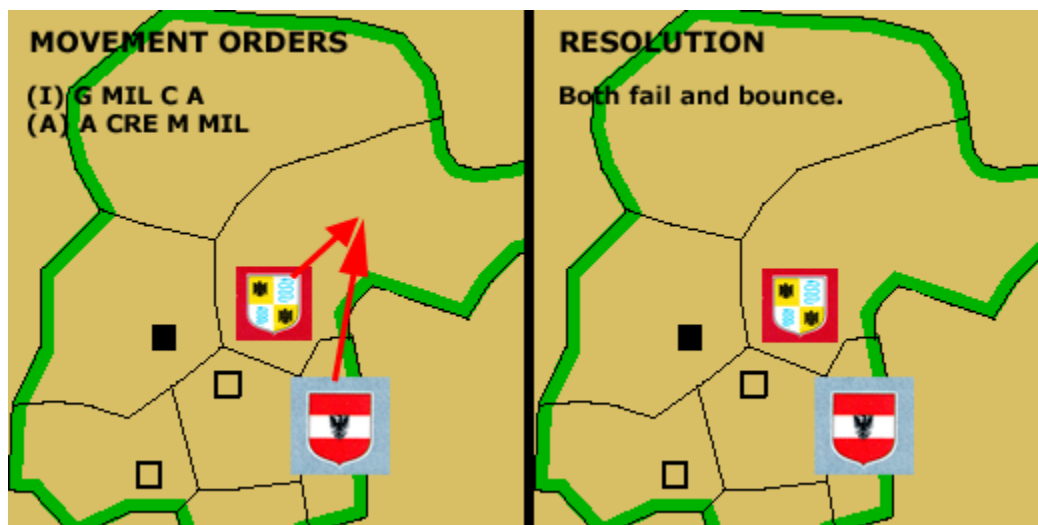
Example 4 – attack of a supporting unit

In this example, Bergamo's attack on Cremona will break support, reducing Pavia's attack on Milan to a 1:1 attack, thus causing a bounce.
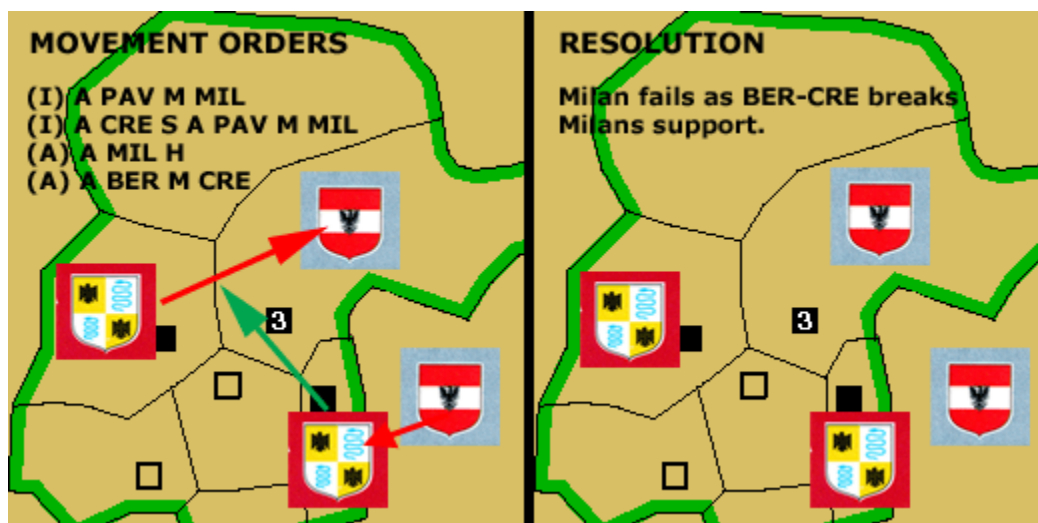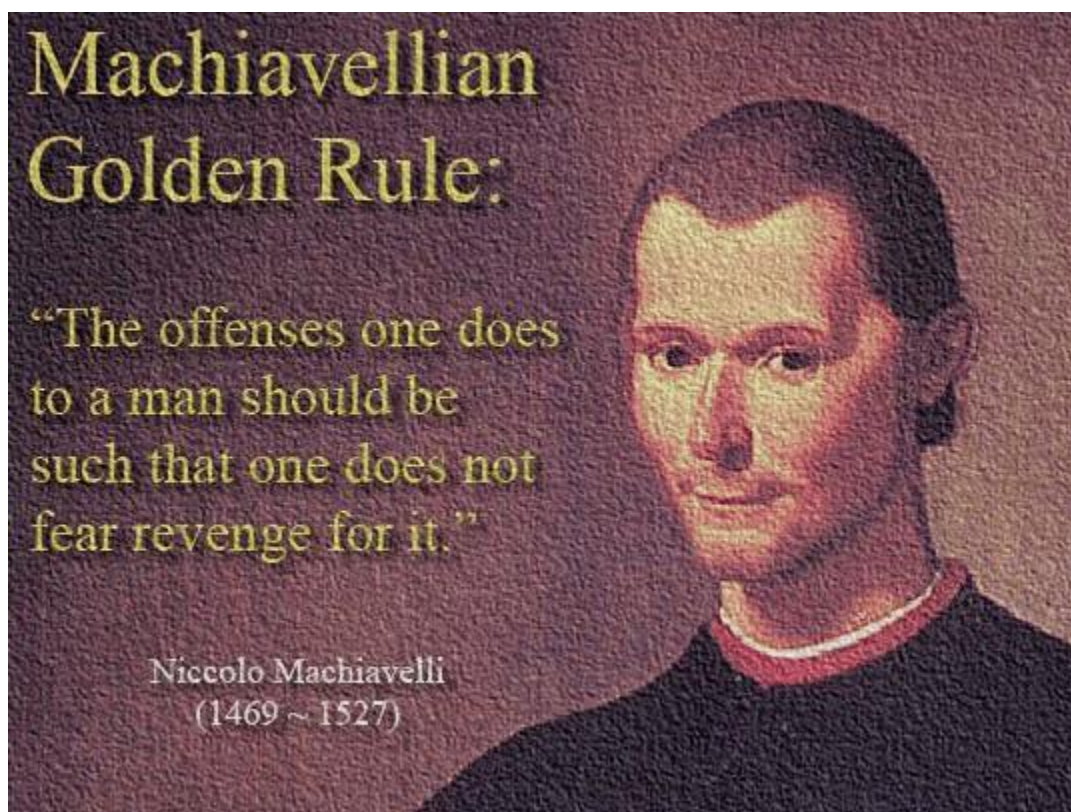

Example 5 – garrison conversion according to Mach 2 rules

In this example, G MIL tries to convert into A MIL, while Austrian A CRE tries to enter Milan. Both units fail.

Example 6 – garrison conversion according to Classic Mach

Classic Mach explicitly allows conversion, if the garrison has the same strength as the attacker. Thus, in Classic Mach (rule VIII.B.3.c, Basic section) the conversion of G MIL into A MIL will succeed and Austrian A CRE will bounce.
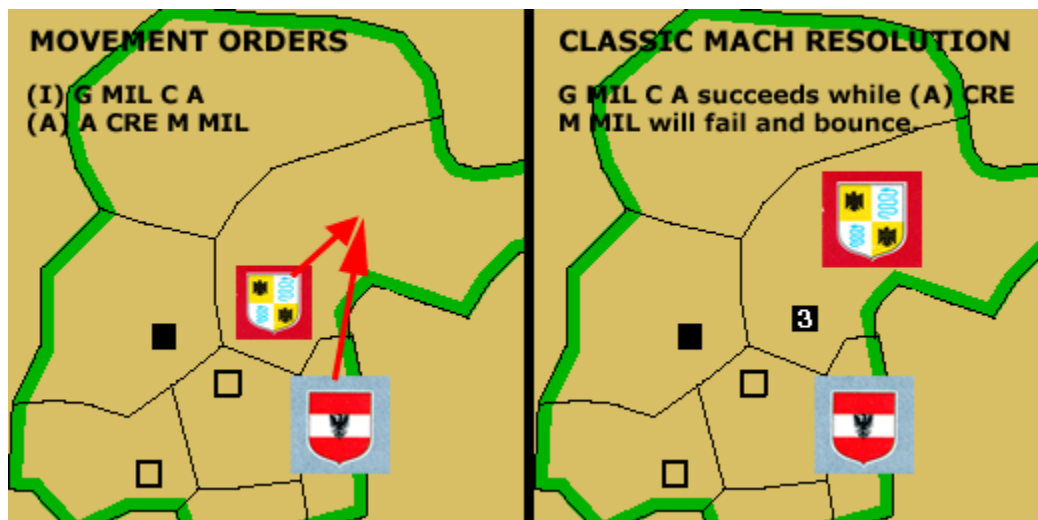
Machiavellian Golden Rule:

"The offenses one does to a man should be such that one does not fear revenge for it."

Niccolo Machiavelli
(1469 ~ 1527)

PBM Puzzle # 1

```
P E R E X I B E W R A T S A K O W B K R
E L Z F T S E U Q R A T S R W A R B U A
M U T W P H O E N I X B S E D U O Q L W
S R E N O S I R P C I T C A L A G A K F
R K G N N W S T A R M A S T E R M L A O
S G F C R O D T M O M M I D G A R D G G
D I Z T E R R H A U I X N Z Z K K U Y O
U I E P F D A E I F M C B E A T K R F F
E T J D N O Z N H K O D E M F O S Y E K
L S W G I F I E Y S A T U R N A L I A D
M A W Y H T L X R I F T L O R D S X C A
A C S B R H N T K H Y B O R I A N W A R
S R J O S E D E T R E A L P O L I T I K
T I P T Q G J M U J G I K V E C Q E O S
E M B H S O U P U R F W D T R H Q D O T
R E V L L D Q I L I C O J H W A Q J R A
S A P N B S M R A G A M E M N O N N U R
S M L A E R N E T T O G R O F S E H Q E
H E R O I C F A N T A S Y V B M Z H U W
B A L A N C E O F P O W E R T E I U Y B
```

ALAMAZE

KEYS OF MEDOKH

THE NEXT EMPIRE

BALANCE OF POWER

SATURNALIA

DARKSTAR

HEROIC FANTASY

HYBORIAN WAR

PORTINIUM

STAR QUEST

SWORD OF THE GODS

MIDGARD

RIFTLORDS

AGAMEMNON

ITS A CRIME

FORGOTTEN REALMS

STARWEB

STARMASTER

REAL POLITIK

TOADAL CHAOS

FOG OF WAR

GALACTIC PRISONERS

DUELMASTERS

LIZARDS

CRUENTI DEI

INFERNO

PHOENIXBSE

Where We're Heading. . .

Status is T plus four. We have separation, Houston. I repeat, we have separation.

Four issues are under our belts, now, and this issue is really the beginning of the next stage of our progress on our journey into the wild blue yonder of human imagination. Who would've thought it possible, not so very long ago?

How exhilarating, it is, to be a part of this momentous occasion. It's almost like being a player in a PBM game from the golden heyday of postal gaming, as we take the gaming world by surprise.

One minute, they think that PBM is dead. The next thing that they know, a new PBM magazine is launched. But, from whence did it come? How could such a thing be possible?

Even as we began appearing on the radar of their gaming consciousness, the significance of our arrival on the gaming horizon is lost on all but a few. We

have achieved the element of surprise!

Rather than ready a handful of away teams, I advocate, instead, on behalf of a full scale invasion.

No doubt that some would be all-too-willing to content themselves with snatching the occasional gamer that grazes mindlessly out of sight of the herd.

Instead, what PBM needs - what PBM gaming's legacy is worthy of - is an invasion that targets broad swaths of the gaming public.

We must invade their strongholds, their sanctuaries, their innermost sanctums of gaming delight. Little do they realize that the assault has already begun.

This time, we come bearing more than just stamps and envelopes. We have allies!

Hither come the ancestral descendants!

Sporting advanced techno-weaponry of gaming entertainment made

possible only by extensive research into new fields of technology has yielded our form of turn-based gaming new and powerful advantages.

Potential advantages, anyway.

The temptation is always great to focus upon strengths, rather than weaknesses. Play to our strengths, they say! But, whatever you do, be certain that you pay no attention to that man behind the PBM curtain.

PBM gaming lost the War of Propaganda. It resulted in great casualties across the rank and file of PBM players at every PBM company.

The impact of the Internet upon the world of PBM gaming is often remembered as THE seminal event for PBM - an extinction level event.

Yet, technology had already impacted PBM gaming long before the Internet even loomed on the horizon. Precursors to the Internet included BBS door games.

The inherent nature of technology is that it envelopes us like some form of nano-swarm. It changes us, even as we adapt to it. Man versus machine.

But, of vastly greater importance than technology is innovation, itself.

Say what one will, in numerous ways, the PBM industry has done a much better job of embracing technology than it has of embracing innovation.

Once upon a time ago, PBM gaming had at its disposal a secret weapon. It had struck gaming gold! It was an El Dorado of entertainment - and it was growing by leaps and bounds!

Innovation in game design was running rampant in PBM circles. New PBM games were popping up, left and right. It was a PBM dream come true, for many PBM companies.

Fast forward to the present day.

Ancestral descendants of PBM games are making some of the exact, same mistakes as their gaming ancestors of the postal genre. They are deceiving themselves with some of

the same old propaganda.

Whatever the various personal opinions across the hobby and industry about this magazine may be, whether positive or negative or some combination thereof, one thing is certain. Thus far, it has proven to be a real learning experience for me.

When I tour the battlefield that spans the length and the width and the breadth of PBM gaming, if I encounter groups of gamers that are loyal to their game and to their moderator, I am heartened by it.

Some are wary of articles that I have not even begun to write, yet. It is their right to be wary.

Even still, I have a task at hand. In practical terms, there are far more games in existence than I have time available to play. It simply isn't possible to be everywhere, at once.

I have offered free advertising space to PBM companies and to ancestral descendants, in order that they might have opportunity to hawk and praise their games, within the pages of this publication.

I have extended an open invitation for others to submit articles, to share their views and their opinions on turn-based games that they play. Some have chosen to do so. Others have not yet taken advantage of this opportunity to be heard, but the invitation stands, even still.

In due time, I will offer my opinions and my views on various games, as I get to them, respectively, and as time and my schedule allows.

Elsewhere, talk of game set-up fees leaves me wondering what lessons have been learned from PBM's past, and what lessons must still be learned, anew?

Many battles have been fought over the course of the years of PBM's past to get the hobby to where it is, today - for better or for worse.

Yet, the Battle for PBM"s future has not even begun, yet. In order for play by mail gaming to become the high ground of gaming entertainment, it must be prepared to move from its current status quo. If PBM wants greater market share, if it craves new

gamers, then is continued complacency the right course? Or is the industry prepared to fight for them?

A defeatist attitude does not serve the cause of victory.

Many are they who could no doubt lecture me on the error of my ways, where such subject matter is concerned. By all means, lecture away! Let the lecturing commence, already.

This genre of gaming reminds me, in a way, of a Steampunk setting. The lumbering beasts of old, classic PBM games in vintage form, rumbling out of the past into a modern world. Alongside them and over and around them come the ancestral descendants, the more technologically advanced programming heirs to the PBM throne.

Yet, on the advertising front, how innovative has PBM become?

I have spoken about advertising a lot, of late, for a very simple reason - because, I think that it's important.

And, not just important, but a cornerstone of any successful undertaking to promote this hobby and this industry in the modern day and age.

Yet, where are all of the imaginative and colorful advertisements that populated magazines of old, whose names live on in infamy to this very day? Whether The Dragon magazine or White Dwarf, whether Paper Mayhem or Dungeon, those ads stuck in the minds of countless generations - and they were engines of war that helped PBM gaming to carve out its own place on the gaming scene.

Whether some PBM companies choose to advertise in Suspense & Decision magazine or not is largely irrelevant. In case nobody has noticed, no profit is made off of free advertising.

Regaining the advertising initiative is absolutely critical to capturing higher ground for the industry. If the PBM industry, itself, thinks that PBM is dead, then in all fairness, why should people in other genres of gaming not embrace that very same defeatist mentality?

If the hopes of the hobby rests upon assuring the gaming public that playing

PBM games has something in common with board games, or that it shares some similarities to role playing, then that's all fine and dandy, but it fails to explain what about the hobby makes it unique - and by extension, what makes it stand out from those very things.

If PBM games are so similar to board games and RPG games, then shouldn't we also begin including ads for board games and role playing games in our advertising? Take note.

Of course, for those who advocate their gaming products as deep and complex strategy games, that these aren't kids' games, then I can't help but to wonder where the PBM games for kids are - if PBM is as diverse and inclusive of a genre of gaming as it seems to want the world to believe that it is.

And what about instant gratification? I've ran across I don't know how many comments made by different people who have characterized PBM games as lacking, when it comes to instant gratification.

Such utter nonsense!

Just as the mechanisms of

game mechanics and the mode of delivery of the gaming experience differs for PBM games, compared to other forms of gaming (such as video games, for example), to suggest that PBM games are lacking in the instant gratification department is to propagate a falsehood.

You want instant gratification? Just you wait and see, when that long-awaited turn results envelope arrives in your mailbox - BAM! Instant gratification.

With each generation of video games, the graphics improve. To maximize your video game experience, you might want to upgrade your video card. You might even want to add some more RAM, or a faster CPU.

Or, if you want to save yourself some money, you could upgrade your whole approach to gaming, by swapping out computer or video games for games that are not video-dependent. The gaming environment of PBM games? The human imagination, itself! It comes packaged as standard equipment, with every play by mail game.

Looking for a greater gaming challenge than the newest computer or video game has to offer? Then, it might behoove you to consider trading out artificial intelligence in favor of real, genuine intelligence - namely, of the homo sapien variety.

The title of this column is, "Where We're Heading." I continuously ask myself where we are headed. Not just as a magazine, but as a hobby and as a genre of gaming. Not just as an industry of gaming, but as an industry of entertainment.

PBM gaming won't ever really die, until everyone quits playing it, and unless everyone quits talking about it. It often *seems* dead, for the very simple reason that we are either not talking about it, or just talking about it to ourselves.

With PBM gaming still alive and kicking (and it very much is), but with player communities segregated by game and separated by Internet distances from one another, the danger of dialogue on the subject of PBM gaming not reaching people outside our respective little bastions of gaming solitude is a very real one to the hobby and to the industry as a whole.

Between issues, I invariably receive advice and encounter commentary that makes me pause and think. These are boons visited upon me, and for them, I consider myself fortunate.

I suffer under no delusion that this magazine is a panacea for all that ails the PBM industry. I don't think that any one thing could ever fill that bill.

At most, it is probably merely a vehicle that has some utility value for raising greater awareness about a hobby of gaming and a gaming industry that could probably do with a bit of fixing up.

The Internet is a big place. I mean, really REALLY big!

And, if the Internet won't come to PBM, then I fully intend to bring PBM to the Internet - one individual at a time, if need be.

If you are both able to spread the word, and willing to spread the word, then maybe, together, we will find the key to true progress.

Where are we headed?

By now, the answer should seem obvious, I think. We're headed forward - always! Next stop? Issue 5!

Lost in the Gaming Wilderness? Searching for a game to play?? DON'T GIVE UP HOPE!!

And God said, Let there be Play By Mail, that mail might be good. And God saw that it was good.

And the evening and the morning were the eighth day.

And God said, Let PBM bring forth creatures after its own kind, games and Game Moderators and Players to play the games.

And God saw it, and it was good.

And the evening and the morning were the ninth day.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and mulitply, and fill the envelopes with stamps, that turn orders and turn results should flow both day and night.

And God said, Let there be a PBM list, that players should be able to find the game of their liking.

And the evening and the morning were the tenth day.

Greg Lindahl's
The PBM List

Middle Earth Games

present

The battle of the five armies

Dante's Inferno

The Trials and Tribulations of Publishing a PBM Magazine

The hours are long. The work is tedious. The pay is non-existent.

So, why then do it?

In a nutshell, it needs doing. PBM needs a magazine of some form, shape, size, and frequency. It just does.

How do I get people on board, then? In truth, I don't, actually. They get themselves on board. The persuasion lies, not at the tip of my keyboard's keys, but rather, in their hearts and their minds and their imaginative little gaming souls.

You can get burned out on any kind of gaming. Over the years, many got burned out on PBM gaming. With other forms of gaming, the burnout tends to hit quicker.

My son's favorite game at the moment is Minecraft. I asked him, one day, a few weeks back, "So, what do you like the most about Minecraft?"

His response was almost immediate. He didn't have to think about it. He didn't have to ponder all of the many wonderful aspects and things associated with playing that game. His reply was simple and straightforward, "Playing with other people."

Did you hear what I said? Playing with other people.

Sure, he plays it through the Internet. He plays this game that is so terribly addicting with other people - complete strangers that he doesn't know from Adam. Does that remind you of anything?

It's on his mind, this Minecraft. Perhaps they should change the name of it to Mindcraft,

instead. He has tons of fun playing a game that is not exactly at the cutting edge of graphics. Yet, he finds it to be eminently gratifying. In numerous ways, it reminds me of playing games by mail.

For all of the talk about the Internet, technology, and electronic this or digital that, what my son is playing at eight years old looks one Hell of a lot like a PBM game to me.

But, then again, what do I know? I'm just some crazy old guy who thought that it would be a good idea to just start publishing a PBM magazine straight out of the blue.

PBM starts out as playing a game with or against other strangers. But, that's only how it starts out, and even then, only if you discount those who were introduced to a PBM game by a friend, family member, or known acquaintance.

Many are they who cease to remain strangers. PBM gamers get to know one another. They learn to appreciate one another. PBM gaming, like perhaps all forms of turn-based gaming, tends to grow into a social activity.

Via interfacing with Minecraft, my son participates in a social adventure with countless others - although, normally, it tends to be with a relative handful of other players at any given moment.

When he sends text messages during the game, he is engaged in his own form of inter-player diplomacy. Again, what does that remind you of?

My son talks in terms of skin packs, texture packs, and mods. Clearly, he is interested in innovation, and it relates to and as it

impacts this, his preferred form of gaming.

What does any of this have to do with publishing a PBM magazine, though? Quite simply, it has everything to do with it.

One of the greatest of tribulations of publishing a PBM magazine has to do with a single feat. I am talking about the feat of communicating effectively.

PBM lost the war of propaganda for the very simple reason that, as a hobby and as an industry and as a genre of gaming, PBM doesn't tend to communicate very effectively.

It used to. In fact, once upon a time ago, it communicated to the world that it was new and cutting edge and something to be excited about.

Game companies fret over what they should call themselves, in the current day and age. It reminds me of politicians, each trying to outdo the other on coming up with the best campaign slogan.

How mightily they strive to distinguish themselves with the latest slogan of the moment! My, but how they vie with one another over such pitiful morsels of communication.

And on top of it all, to make matters even worse, the only active PBM magazine around is helmed by someone who favors the art of naval gazing. Fancy that. How much worse could it possibly be?

With a stated goal of publishing at a monthly rate of frequency, this is probably one of the swiftest PBM vessels to ever sail the Sea of PBM Entertainment.

From my perspective, from my vantage point behind the wheel, we've ground to make up.

But, if you look at the hard numbers (or, at least, the closest thing to hard numbers for

the PBM industry that you can stumble across, at the absolute height of its former glory days of old, the actual number of gamers that we need to shoot for are actually quite small, relatively speaking.

Millions of gamers are NOT required, to make PBM gaming smoking hot, again.

Recently, we've had a few individuals begin to trickle in to the PlayByMail.Net website's forum. What were they looking for? A PBM game to play.

This magazine, Suspense & Decision, was cited by them, upon their arrival in our forum.

So, even if we're not doing everything right, I do believe that we are doing at least something right.

I don't tend to worry about future issues. Rather, I tend to try and stay focused upon the particular issue that I am working on, at any given moment in time.

Some things are beginning to fall in place. Other things seem to be falling directly on top of my head. Yet, much work remains to be done, in any event.

Each issue that we publish is its own thing, a work in its own respective right. Yet, each issue is, also, a mere component part - a singular piece - of a greater, collective whole. Enjoy each issue, but never lose sight of the bigger picture.

From where I sit, here in this realm of publication doom, the prospect of failure surrounds me, at every turn. Oddly enough, the temptation to quit is nowhere to be found. Perhaps it will appear later on down the road on this path through the Perdition of Publication. This is a journey that I take, one issue at a time. It is a path seemingly without end. How, then, do I know when I've reached my destination? To not know the answer, is to wander through inferno.

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

At Face Value
A look at the Facebook numbers

February 15th, 2014

Facebook Page	# of Likes
Flying Buffalo, Inc.	1,376 Likes
Empires at War 1805	334 Likes
Takamo Universe	182 Likes
Clash of Legends	104 Likes
Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire	86 Likes
Starweb	82 Likes
Duel2	63 Likes
Rolling Thunder Games	63 Likes
Fallen Empires PBE	38 Likes
Rimworlds	34 Likes
Galactic Prisoners	27 Likes
Alamaze	25 Likes
It's a Crime	24 Likes

February 15th, 2014

Facebook Discussion Group	# of members
Hyborian War	53 members
Middle-Earth PBM	46 members
Phoenix BSE	36 members
Forgotten Realms	35 members
Legends	26 members
Starfleet Warlord	25 members
Science Fiction Writers and Artists Group for Takamo Universe	23 members
Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive	22 members
Lands of Nevron	19 members
Duel2	8 members
Fall of Rome	2 members
Play By Mail Games	1 member

LEGENDS

The
ONE RING
module
in the Legends
game system

ORIGINS AWARDS

Legends 2004
Gamer's Choice

Legends 2011
The ONE RING

ORIGINS AWARD WINNER

The One Ring™

A Legends Module based on J. R. R. Tolkien's

The Lord of the Rings™

HEROIC FANTASY
FANTASY ROLE PLAYING BY MAIL

YOU direct a party of up to fifteen fighters and magic users (humans, elves, dwarves, fairies, gremlins, even trolls) through a dungeon maze killing monsters, gathering treasure, and hunting for magical prizes.

There are currently four levels (ultimately, there will be five) and over 400 players already exploring the depths. This game has been extensively play-tested, and has been running since 1982. The per-turn fee is only $3.00, and for this one fee, you get to move all 15 of your characters. They can stay together, or split up into several parties moving in different directions, all for one single turn fee! No "extra action fees,' ever! Our game is completely computer-run, so no human referee interferes with your enjoyment - *and there are seldom any errors.* (If we DO make an error on your turn, we will refund **DOUBLE** your turn fee!)

Flying Buffalo, Inc. has been running play by mail games for 44 years. We are the very first professional PBM company. We are members of the Game Manufacturers Association (**GAMA**). In addition to Heroic Fantasy, we have science fiction games, war games, and medieval games. Write today for a free copy of our PBM catalog, or send $2 for the rules to HEROIC FANTASY. (Please do not ask to be in any game, until you have seen a copy of the rules).

Flying Buffalo, lnc., P.O. Box 8467, Scottsdale, AZ 85282
WWW.FLYINGBUFFALO.COM