

PBM

Issue 28

Unearthed

The Mysterious Realm of Play-By-Mail Gaming

28th Baleful Issue!



February 19th, 2023

Who wears the Ring of PBM Power?

PlayByMail.Net

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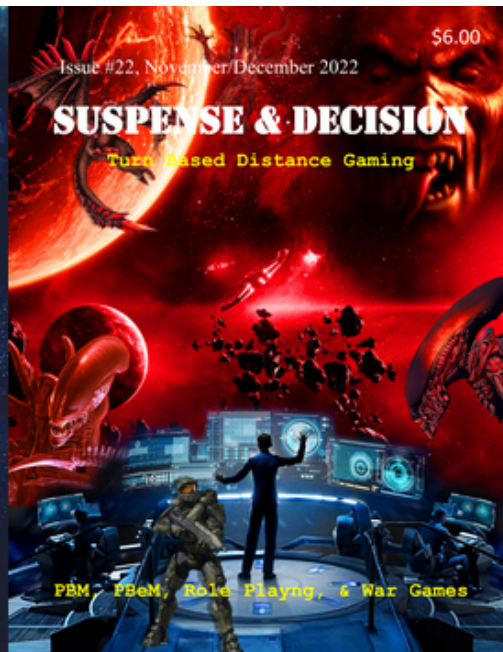
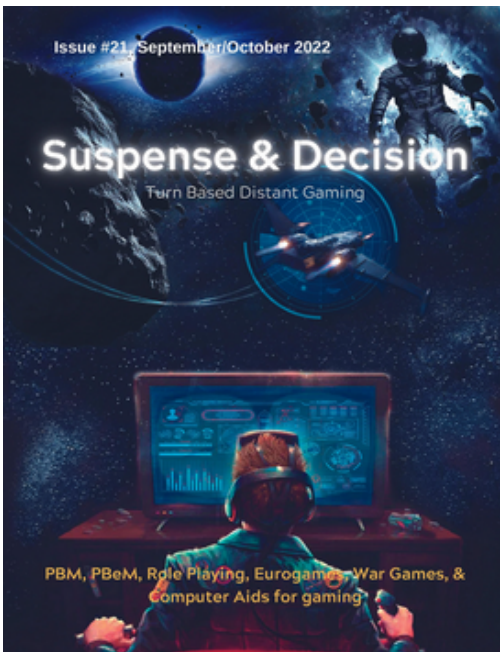
PBM QUOTE

I am taking a look at Austerlitz, which is one of the few unknown to me from the "old days". But I am basically just now getting back into PBM after a while, probably a decade, away. And besides purely historical wargames, I am also a fan of science fiction and fantasy, as demonstrated by MEPBM.

JulianTheApostate

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**A Game of
Hyborian War**
The Saga of the
Kingdom of Nemedra
in HW-982 continues
Charles Mosteller



Overall, Turn #19 turned out to be a pretty good turn for Nemedra in Hyborian War game number HW-982. *Wanna hear about it?*

Nemedra's attempt to conscript some troops from one of its provincial armies was mostly successful. This helped to bolster the number of troops that I would have awaiting assignment, as we head into Turn #20, on top of the troops that I raised, this turn. I did have three troops to defy my commands, which isn't terrible by any stretch of the imagination. Those three troops dispersed to join various minor lords and rulers, which is a colorful way of saying that they deserted and are no more, for game play purposes.

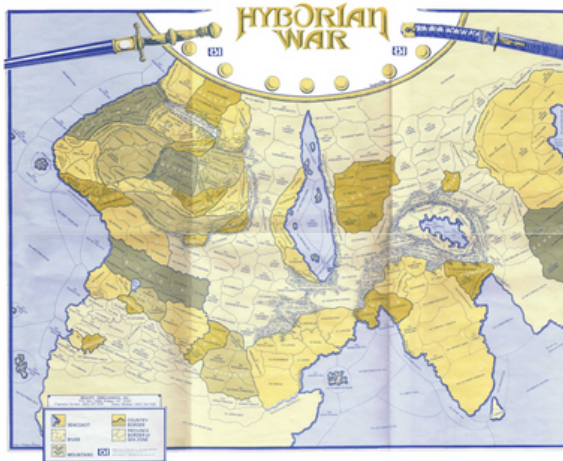
Of all of the kingdoms in Hyborian War that I have played down through the years, Nemedra has probably been the most reliable, where the conscripting of troops is concerned. Troops dispersing is different from troops openly rebelling, and so far this game, Nemedra has not suffered any rebellions. In fact, all of its provinces, both home provinces and conquered provinces, currently have very high loyalty to the throne.

I routinely tend to do a good bit of actively ruling, when I play Hyborian War, although it's entirely optional. It's one of those areas of the

HYBORIAN WAR™

Turn #19

Hyborian War is run by Reality Simulations, Inc.



HYBORIAN WAR™

*is a
Play By Mail
game where
you control
the destiny
of the
Hyborian
Age of
Conan.*

game where experience can be a helpful guide on knowing when to actively rule, versus when to use those same characters (monarch and provincial rulers) for other assignments. There's always lots that you want to do, when playing Hyborian War, and far more times than not, you just don't tend to ever have too many characters at your kingdom's disposal.

Zamora decided to launch three more raids into the province of Shadizar, which I previously conquered from that kingdom. These ill-conceived raids of Zamora's are turning out to be bloodbaths for Zamora, with a total of 16 Zamoran troops being destroyed in this latest wave of raids.

The Zamoran player also decide to invade Shadizar, and I decided to let him. On the way in, his invasion got hit with two Black Death spells, and it ended up being a very brief Open Field battle there on Turn #19. In the battle, Zamora appeared to only lose five troops, but odds are, Black Death wiped out a bunch of troops before the battle, itself, was ever fought.

This battle went Open Field, which meant that its outcome would be resolved the same turn that the enemy invaded, unlike a Set Piece battle which resolves the following turn.

Shadizar, the former capital province of Zamora, was about to be the scene of more bloodshed. Unfortunately for Zamora, that kingdom did not send enough troops to get the job done.

When all was said and done, the battle proved to be a very short one, with the Zamorans sounding the retreat after only five of their troops destroyed. The Black Death spells that had hit their invasion force coming in apparently thinned their troop numbers sufficiently, so that they had no real chance of ever taking the province. *Death to Zamora!*

As soon as I knew the outcome of this Battle for Shadizar, my gaze turned far to the Northwest of that province, where I had dispatched an imperial army to try and aid Nemedian's ally, the Border Kingdom, from invasion by the red-bearded Vanir of the Kingdom of Vanaheim.

Thus, I was eager to see this battle rage! An army of 30 troops I had dispatched to assist the Borderlanders in their defense of this province that they had previously conquered from the Cimmerian barbarians. Unlike the battle in Fort A terrain that transpired in Shadizar, here in the province of the Cimmerian Heartland, Marsh terrain would be where the clash of armies would take place.

Unfortunately for my kingdom, in Open Field battles, which this contest of arms in the Cimmerian Heartland turned out to be, Nemedian forces retreat after 50% losses (standard losses) in Open Field battles. Vanaheim, being a barbarian kingdom, retreats at heavy losses (75%) in Open Field. Especially in light of the fact that the depiction of troops that showed the respective sides' forces on the field of battle revealed more Nemedian troops

intact, my army sounded the retreat, yielding a victory for the Kingdom of Vanaheim, against my wishes. *Alas, but what is a player to do?*

It was frustrating, but sometimes during games of Hyborian War, events will prove to be frustrating. This time, fate and fortune favored the Vanir, mangy red-bearded dogs that they do be. Thus, I would have to wait for another day, for a different turn, to exact any semblance of vengeance for this turn's disappointing battle outcome.

I wouldn't have to wait long, to see Nemedian steel clash with the valor of the Vanir, as I had already set into motion an invasion of Northern Bossonia, an invasion that would manifest itself the following turn, if the Vanir would only live up to their reputation as great warriors, and not seek a treaty of peace from my kingdom and its many minor lords.

Peace treaties are one of the most powerful tools in any Hyborian War kingdom's arsenal of tricks. They can save your kingdom, or they can bind your kingdom under ironclad agreements that dictate that peace shall prevail. But peace treaties, you see, are frequently one-sided banes that bind your hand, but not the hand of your enemy.

However, it is not given unto monarchs nor players, alike, to have 100% control over such great matters of state. And not having total assurances that one will succeed heading into the next turn of Hyborian War helps to ensure that the fog of war remains thick. It is both frustrating and tantalizing, simultaneously, and the gods of war are fickle, indeed!

Having previously dispatched the Nemedian character, Lord Tirus Bragorus on a mission to spy the kingdom military of Aquilonia, only to later learn that he had been captured and thrust into an Aquilonian dungeon, Turn #19 saw me decide to command this very same character to

rescue himself. *Let the mongrel curs of Aquilonia lament, when Lord Tirus Bragorus made good his forthcoming escape!*

With SUPERIOR intrigue and GOOD heroism, surely he would win his freedom, anew. Alas, 'twas not meant to be, for when the turn results for Turn #19's outcome were firmly in hand, I learned that Lord Tirus Bragorus, the provincial ruler of the province of the Heartlands, was slain in his escape attempt. *Confound it all!*

So now, Nemedra was short yet another character. Damned if you do, and damned if you don't. This is *exactly* how Hyborian War feels, at times. Not always, and not even most of the time, but certain times, you just can't seem to win for losing. For Lord Tirus Bragorus, he had now suffered not just the ignominy of death, but also two failed missions in a row. This is why a Hyborian War player cannot let any character's stats go to their head. Lord Tirus Bragorus also had POOR personal combat ability, which likely undermined his bid to free himself from Aquilonian incarceration. *Pah!*

In spite of this tragedy, I did manage to succeed in acquiring some timely spy information on Vanaheim, this turn. Neither feast nor famine, my luck was a mixed bag, this turn. Seldom does every last thing that one attempts during a given turn of Hyborian War succeed. If anything at all can be counted upon, it's that luck will figure out a way to shaft your kingdom, somehow or other, each turn, every turn. As a player of the game, you really have to guard against expectations that every last thing is going to go well for your kingdom, as you anxiously and eagerly await your turn results to arrive in the mail. *Not in e-mail, but in the postal mail!*

Ridicule it as old fashioned and archaic, if you like, but there's nothing else quite like the feeling of your turn results envelope arriving in your

mailbox. Whatever else may be said about the Internet in jest or in seriousness, that feeling of your turn results finally arriving in hand, physically in hand, is as fresh and as exciting as it ever was. *For some things in life are, and remain, truly timeless!*

One nugget of information that I learned, this turn, was that Nemedra's ally, the Border Kingdom, was now ranked 11th. That's 11th out of 36 player kingdoms. *The Borderlanders were doing very well, indeed!*

If you're out there, and you've not yet given Hyborian War a try, then know that you are missing out on a real blast of a game. Not everything goes according to plan. You win some battles, and you lose others. Your kingdom gains new characters over the course of the game, but the Hyborian Age is a deadly time in which to live, and danger lurks around many corners and on many missions.

The outcome of some battles prove to be close, real nail-biters, whereas others will see your forces woefully outnumbered or your forces beat down badly with magic - *or both!* But that doesn't mean that you can't have a ton of fun as you plot and scheme and plan from turn to turn to turn. *And did I mention that you can make some great friends along the way?*

Well, you can, provided that you're willing to interact with other players in the game through mutually beneficial scheming and conspiring, or via the good old art of talking shit with your fellow players. That's where the Hyborian War forum site, *The Road of Kings*, comes in. You can register an account there for free, and drink to the lees of war and conversation to your heart's content.

So, what are you waiting for? Pile the corpses high, and even tell the occasional lie, for all is fair in both love and war. Hyborian War is a game that I love. *You might love it, too!*

HYBORIAN WAR™

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The Ring of PBM Power

Bryan Ciesielski

I'm excited about PBM in 2023. I missed the boat as a teenager, because just when I had started to scrape a few bucks together, online multiplayer computer gaming exploded onto the scene. After only a few short turns of Heroic Fantasy, my money was quickly diverted from Flying Buffalo to a Hewlett Packard with a Pentium. I have no regrets, since computer gaming in the 90s was quite the time. It was the age of Counter Strike, Quake clans, and

scaffolding, but you had the important responsibility of filling in the rest of the detail. You could do so at your own pace. You could get lost in there.

Much like "the One Ring", those PBM memories lay distant and undisturbed at the bottom of a river while life flowed by. Until last year. Sometime in the fall of 2022, a mysterious hand plunged into the sediment and pulled up that ring. Within days, I ended up finding the newly



Bryan Ciesielski
(werewolf_punch)

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Battle.net. It motivated me to learn how to program, was part of college life, and ultimately led to a profession in software development.

Looking back, there was something different about play-by-mail games though. It was more interactive and unpredictable than reading a book. Someone created a world for you, and invited you to participate in it. But unlike playing a video game or watching a movie, your imagination had to be *on*. Someone else created the

launched PBM Unearthed, Suspense & Decision, and the PBM Discord. Not only was this stuff still around, but there was life in it, yet! I don't even remember why I started thinking about PBM after more than 25 years, but the sheer coincidence of the timing is not lost on me. I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions there.

Thus the seed was planted. But, the fruit was not that I should join one of the many stalwart games that have been holding the line. Creative gears (long since rusted) began to move

and then pick up steam, leaving me scrambling to get the ideas into a notebook, lest they be lost. At this point, it started to become clear: I am going to make a *new* PBM game.

Even back then, I think I really just wanted to be the GM. To create a world for others to come in and enjoy. The rules, structure, and the math of it. The story, the characters. The little details to delight and surprise. But sadly, as a wee lad, I lacked the necessary focus, skills, and resources to make that happen. Very thankfully, I

now find myself with all of those.

Now maybe this is a strange thing to do. But strange is a relative word, and often the "strange" things in life are *precisely* those worth doing. It's going to be hard, there's no doubt about that: there is a ton of research to do, game design principles to learn, and so much code to write. But the work is fun. Along the way, I will hang out in the Discord for support and to make some friends, and read PBMU and S&D to stay in the know.

My game will be a wild-west RPG with a touch of the supernatural (how supernatural? To be determined...) It will be PBM in the classic sense, so you can stalk the mailman and rip open an envelope, both of which I firmly believe are cornerstones of the hobby. And yes, there will be a nice website.

Until next time, see you on the PBM Discord!



NOTE: Bryan Ciesielski roams the [PBM Discord](#) under the moniker of **werewolf_punch**. Be sure to look him up, there.

Editorial Fluff

While he doesn't look like any hobbit that I've ever seen, it was uplifting to receive Bryan Ciesielski's e-mail and article, even if I can't spell his last name. More than anything else, though, it was the one paragraph, in particular (the one about PBM memories laying distant and undisturbed, him pulling the ring from the sediment, and then finding PBM Unearthed, Suspense & Decision, and the PBM Discord within days of that event), that really caught my eye.

The analogy to Tolkien's writings brought the flavor to this PBM tale. More than a mere ring-bearer does this one be, though. Indeed, he may very well be heir to the Great Throne of Play By Mail. Certainly, he's far too handsome a devil to pass himself off as a hobbit, you know.

On numerous different times in the past, I have described myself and my PBM efforts as being a placeholder. None of what I do is the proverbial main event. That's yet to come. Issues of PBM Unearthed are little more than torches, insignificant guideposts on the path to things yet to come for PBM. Guideposts, if you will. Trail markers. Hints of the PBM possible.

Bryan Ciesielski has done went and found himself a PBM ring of power. But is it *THE* PBM Ring of Power? At this point in time, there's simply no way to know, for absolute certain. And just how many of these rings of PBM power are there out there, just waiting to be found? Honestly, no one knows - *not even me*.

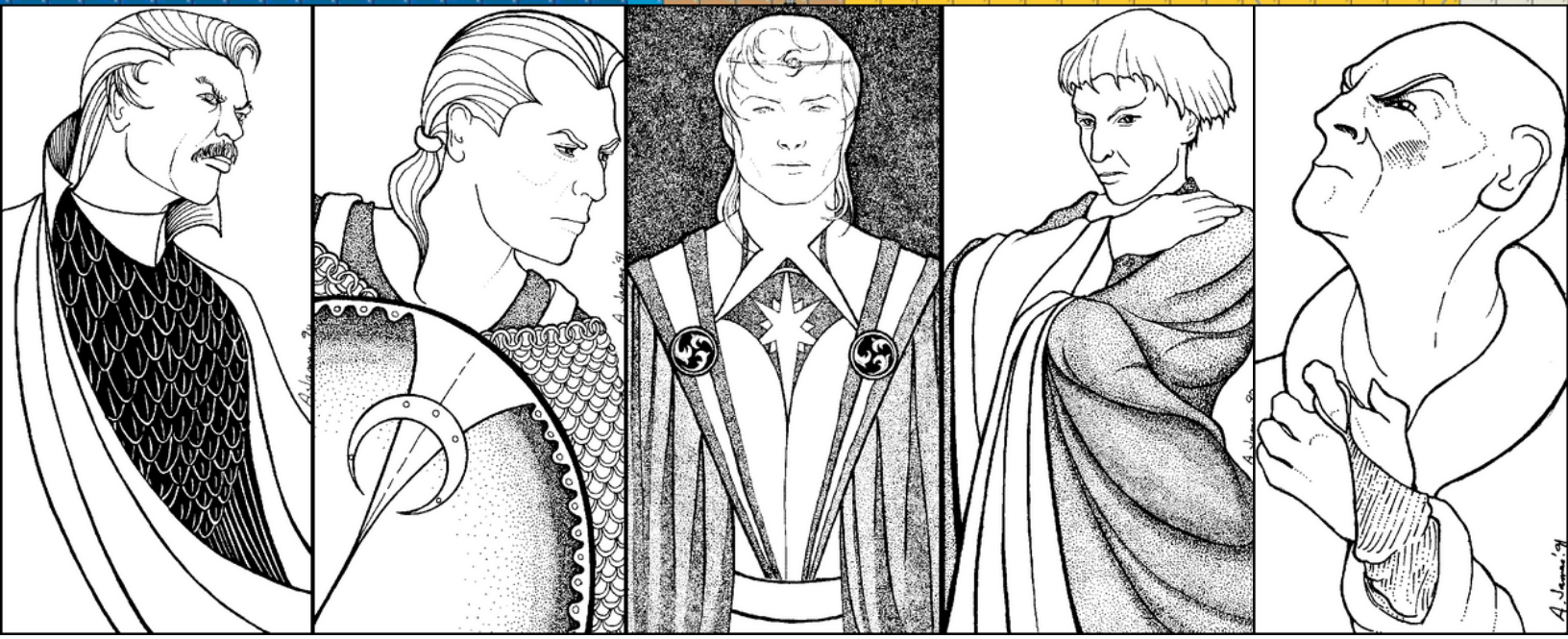
Daveed Fa'ear (David Fair) who runs the PBM game, ExIsles, found one of these rings of PBM power, also. Yet, ExIsles didn't prove sufficient to sate his thirst for PBM gaming. Hither comes a new PBM game in its playtest stage - *Civilize!*

To be certain, the Old Guard of play by mail gaming remains intact, even still, but its grip on PBM power has become greatly diminished with the passage of time. Retirements, deaths, gradual loss of interest - these are the kinds of things that bring one age to a close, allowing for a new age, the dawn of a new PBM era, to be ushered in.

You may think that I'm crazy. You may even think that PBM is long dead and buried. *However, PBM rises right before our very eyes!*



middle earth



Middle-earth PBM



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"I love playing Middle-Earth Play-by-(e)Mail. It's like a chess board with 25 players...It's exciting and gives me scope for both deep and creative thinking, to come up with the best strategy. With the other players who are 'with me,' each game can be both a social activity and a cooperative enterprise."

Jeremy Richman



Daemonrift 3

The Armageddon War

Daemonrift:3 is a module of the turn-based adventure game DungeonWorld. Understanding of the rules and style of play are necessary to take part. Daemonrift is a weekly (ish) module.

<http://www.madcentral.co.uk/dungeonworld/daemonrift3/>

The Kingdom of Panmarlon was dying, slowly, painfully.

Eaten away from the inside by the endless stream or corrosive, murderous, terrible demons. It had begun on the day the rift opened, and it would end soon. A last gambit. Heroes from Panmarlon would go through the rift, to the place beyond. And take the battle to the Demons in their own land. What they never expected to find was – other humans. From a faraway world. Stranded there with them...

Daemonrift 3: The Armageddon War

Estimated TWO YEARS duration, weekly turns (mostly).

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Thereafter, turns at usual costs.

PARMARLONIAN COMMERCIAL SIGNUP

Four characters, Panmarlonian only.

£20.00 for 20 turns. (Extra characters can be added £5.00 each with 20 free turns.)

Thereafter, turns at usual costs

BERENIAN CHARACTER OPTIONS:

Standard Berenian Startup Characters

Crasimoff's World

for the almost-beginner

Peter Thornhill

The ten riders reined in their horses as they left the shelter of the trees, and gazed out over the valley. Apart from the shimmer of the heat-haze, nothing moved. No bird-call or rustle in the undergrowth disturbed the still air. For the third time in six days since the party had left the town of Nasus, under the leadership of Snagtooth One-Eye, they had found nothing. With a deep sigh, the flame-haired priestess turned to the one-eyed chieftain riding at her side and said, 'Snaggy dear, what are we going to do next?'

This article is intended as a guide for those Crasimoff's World players who have found themselves in a similar situation i.e. you've played a few turns, got the basic feel of the game and want to know where to go from there. Perhaps you've discovered a few ruins only to find that they're empty, or apparently so. Or you've met another party, written, and not received a reply. What do you do next?

The first, and probably most important thing, to do is to set yourself a goal or target. It may just be to find another town or to find every town. It may be to discover all the birds and animals or as many of the different plants as you can. It may be to become the top group on CW, possibly over the dead bodies of those in front of you. Whatever your target is, stick to it until you either achieve it, or decide you wish to change it. Let the GM know what you are trying to achieve, so that he can do his best to help (or hinder) you. He will know which of the

many encounters that he has available you are liable to react to or which rumours will interest you most. My experience has led me to believe that the more you do to help the GM, then the more he is liable to do to help you. This doesn't mean to say that he won't help groups that don't reveal their target; just that he has less information to help him make your part of the game enjoyable. Yours is only one of many turns that he will process in a week and things that may be obvious and simple to you will not be so easy for him. If you have a particular point or problem that you want to put forward, write it on a separate sheet of paper from your turn, headed with your own and your party's name. The GM can then process your turn as quickly as possible and deal with your problem separately; I have never had any trouble with this system.



Peter Thornhill

Having established your target, you must then decide if you are well enough equipped to achieve it. Do you have enough armour, helmets and shields to maximise your defence levels? What about spells? With nearly 200 to choose from, this is obviously difficult, but some are equally obviously essential. If you don't start off with the important ones, try to buy them in towns, as most have the odd spell or two tucked away in the dark corners of the treasury. If you can get hold of the necessary special paper and materials, you might be able to copy a spell you need for another player or NPC, perhaps in return for one of yours or a few Oraks (or a lot of Oraks!). Another source of spells is the Gods, of which more later.

One of the most under-used sources of help and information on CW is the animals. Few parties that I have come across seem to have any kind of relationship with them and yet, in many cases, they have abilities at least as good as some of the more important spells. 'Speak with Animals' (see the illustration) or 'Charm Animal' are obviously useful spells for communicating with them, but the fable of Androcles and the lion is something to bear in mind (he was the one who pulled the thorn from the lion's paw). Different animals can see better, run quicker, carry more and do most things better than humans and will also do them for you in return for a little care and attention. It is even possible to get certain animals to fight for you and yet a lot of parties see them only as a source of food or pelts. As for those who hunt them for fun, I can only hope that they find a pack of fifty kresh, and then we'll see who's hunting whom for fun! Kresh, for the uninitiated or the lucky ones who have yet to meet them, are large, muscular, yellow, wolf-like creatures, who like nothing more than to rip people's throats out. Most animals, however, are not quite as violent and, with little effort, can be persuaded to help your

Speak with Animals

Priest Power

Ethereal Point Use: 30

Duration: Permanent

This spell enables the priest to learn the language of one of the many different animals of the world. The understanding is only very basic and would not enable the priest to hold a complicated conversation, although he may be able to befriend the creature so that it will join the party. There is no limit to the number of languages that a priest can learn but a new spell must be used for each one. What the creature will be able to tell you depends a lot on its intelligence and knowledge.

**Enlisting animals on your side:
information chit (UK game)**

party and increase your chances of survival and success quite dramatically.

Magical weapons and artifacts, although not freely available, can be found or, very rarely, bought. Their uses are fairly obvious and straightforward, but I would always advise players thoroughly to test anything they find before attempting to use it in a life-or-death situation. There is nothing more embarrassing than using something, only to discover on your next turn-result that it doesn't quite do what you think it does, but what the GM *knows* it does. However, magic weapons and artifacts are definitely battle-winners and, as such,

should be sought after avidly (possibly as one of the goals I talked of earlier).

CW's flora is as varied as its fauna and in many cases as useful. Certainly there are plants available that duplicate spells and others that have their own value, in that they can be sold in some towns, usually to addicts (hint, hint). It is not difficult to remind the GM every few turns that you are looking for plants on your travels and it also gives him a further opportunity to involve you in one of his encounters. Some plants will only grow in certain terrain types, thus necessitating a wide-ranging search should you wish to hold a full collection of them. Another way of acquiring a particular one that you may especially want is to contact one of the many players who advertise 'plants for sale'. I must be honest and say that I have never yet tried one of these organisations and have no idea of their reliability so you 'pays your Oraks and takes your choice'. There is also some talk of this being banned by the GM (as it is, in effect, a transfer between non-adjacent parties) so, if you wish to take advantage of their offers, I suggest you do so quickly.

Probably the main source of assistance that players can get access to is to join one of the religious sects of CW and worship its God. There are roughly ten gods with some smaller sub-groups and their beliefs cover virtually all aspects of life on CW. Dedication to a god normally takes place at their temple may involve the party in losing some spells that are contradictory to the sect's beliefs. However, these losses are more than made up by the gifts that the priests of the temple shower onto the group. That is not the end of the god's generosity, either; those players who run their groups in a way compatible to the sect's beliefs can expect help and assistance during their later turns. I strongly advise players to investigate thoroughly all the sects before

making a decision on which one to join, as transferring from one to another is virtually impossible and, even if achieved, is bound to lead to enormous problems. Don't ever expect that the gods will automatically answer your cries for help, particularly if you are a frequent caller; with over 400 groups on CW there are many calls and sometimes the switchboard gets jammed! The UK GM has recently introduced a new system whereby the party's priests can use up some of their spell points to attract their god's attention. Frequent prayer is another thing that helps establish the group's piety and may assist in gaining help from your god or his minions. He, or his priests, may also help provide your group with a goal; my current aim is to build a new temple for the mighty god of Good and Light, K'Nor, and, at an estimated cost of 2,000 Oraks, I am kept very busy in running errands and guarding merchants, in hopes of acquiring sufficient funds. Needless to say, there are many 'spinoff' adventures along the way, and the game is just as enjoyable to me now as it was when I first started playing.

Another way of increasing a group's power, particularly its fighting strength, is to acquire some more members. Most well-established parties have more than their original ten people and, although most of the extras are fighters, it is possible, but more difficult, to recruit priests and mages. Posters in towns are one useful method of recruitment, but the group has to stay in the town for a few days for them to work effectively. The most obvious source of extra priests is the temples of the religious sects and, if you can persuade a priest to travel with you for a while, it is a useful method of finding out a lot about a sect, possibly prior to joining. Two of my extra fighters are ex-bandits recruited after defeating them in battle and capturing them. You obviously have to be careful when

recruiting via this method, as they may only be pretending to join in order to lead their friends down on your party in the middle of the night. It's not very pleasant waking up with a cold, steel blade pressed firmly against your throat!

So, you've decided on your group's target, equipped yourself as thoroughly as you can, with plenty of spells, weapons and animals, and you set out on your quest. Don't forget that there are other methods of getting around CW than on horseback. Apart from the other animals that can be used as mounts, there are several spells that will help to move you around more quickly and there are usually boats available for purchase in most of the ports. Most have oars as well as sails and mastering their use takes only a short while. With most of the main continent thoroughly explored and mapped, to cross the sea and find new lands, and possibly new races, is a reasonable enough goal for anyone. After all, the only offshore island so far discovered is swarming with dwarves, so who knows what fantastic races are lurking in the darker recesses of the GM's mind, ready for springing on some unsuspecting player?

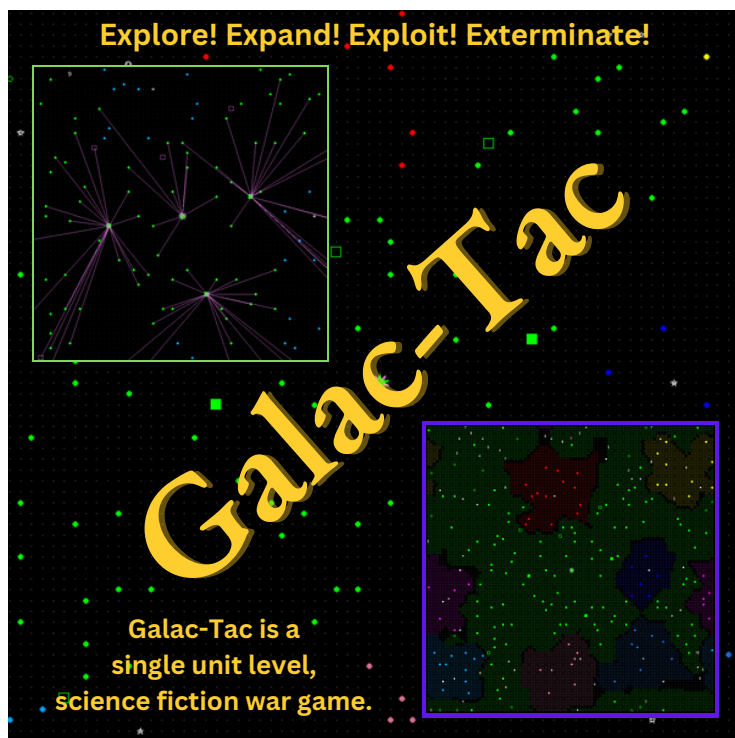
I would suggest that players keep a mapping record of their travels, even though you get a map of the local area as you move. A proper map enables you to quickly plot trade routes between towns, or other points of interest, much more easily than trying to trace a route through old turnsheets. Try to resist the temptation to swap mapping information with other players, as it is so easy to acquire and you lose a lot of enjoyment if you know exactly what is over the horizon. If you must swap information, make it a little more interesting by adding or changing features; a ruin here or a couple of extra hills there. It's surprising how nervous people get when they discover that something is not quite the same as they

thought; they begin to wonder how accurate all the rest of their maps are and exactly who is lying. It all adds to the fun!

Finally, above all else, remember that CW is a game and a highly enjoyable one at that. As with virtually all games of this type, the more effort and time you are prepared to put into them, the more you will get out. The more people you write to, the more time you spend on each turn, the more effort you put into making your characters living, breathing beings, the more fun you will have in this excellent game.

Good luck and a strong right arm!

Editor's Note: Peter Thornhill granted permission for this article that he authored back in 1984, and which first appeared in *Flagship* magazine Issue #5, to be published in *PBM Unearthed*. Our personal thanks to Peter Thornhill!



Mass Brawl and Three Deaths At the North Gate Inn



the
**ISLANDER
RUMOURS**

Compared to certain other hostelries in the Old Town, the **North Gate Inn** prides itself in being a haven of peace and quiet on the edge of Ilanthors Merchant Quarter. But now, the violent and brawling characteristic of this new era under the rule of the Tyrant has finally come to what calls itself the 'peaceful Inn'

Just three days ago, three men lay dead and a further five wounded with broken bones and stab wounds following an altercation between off-duty men of the Beggardly Company and a group of adventurers believed to be members of the Miners Guild.

Led by a minor leader of the Guild name *John Barbery*, the adventurers entered the Inn with the sole intention of provoking a fight that they knew would cause injury and perhaps even death.

Following an escalation in the fighting and perhaps even the use of subtle but noticeable sorcery, the **Town Watch** in almost its entirety were called-out to return order to the **North Gate** and its environs, but not before the three Mercenaries were slain. Were it not for the eventual intervention of the healer known as *Blackbird Mac Allister* it is though that more men involved in the fighting would have died - But, and hear this for the irony! Even the Blackbirds good deeds have caused outcry following accusations that this good fellows tending to injuries and grievous wounds also drew on outlawed Sorcery!

The **Town Watch** as always, is investigating the **Brawl** and seeking out the perpetrators.

Star Fleet



Strategic Campaign in the High Arena

WARLORD

I need YOUR help!

Lets suppose that a gamer is looking for something new to play and has the following parameters:

The sign up process is simple enough that you can open an account and sign up for a game online.

Turns are processed electronically, and you don't have to wait for the snail mail.

Rules are simple enough that you can digest enough to get started within a couple of days, at most.

The game is challenging enough that it will take a long time to master all of the details (if ever), but simple enough that a gamer of average experience can enjoy it and have some hope of surviving, oh, lets say, 10 turns.

Turns run at least 2 times a month, but not more than 2 times a week.

Cost of a single game is no more than \$20 a month.

Does any existing game fit the parameters?

Dan Warncke

I've recently finished QJ215, probably my last game of Quest of the Great Jewels for a while. While it was really exciting, when the game was resurrected 6 or so years ago, and I had some great times playing, it had felt more like a chore, for the past year. I'm currently considering which game to try out next!

Chris Shefler

I enjoy the anticipation of waiting for the turn in the mail. The feel of paper in my hands. The excitement of filling out a turn sheet with trembling hands.

I enjoy very much the opportunity to meet and make friends with people I would otherwise never have had a chance to meet or get to know.

I like that some things in this ever-changing world of ours have remained the same. Could it use some improvement? Sure. But I'd rather see it remain just the way I like it, than risk all manner of infernal changes in an attempt to "modernize" it.

Vincenzo Falcone

Some thoughts? Sometimes, way harder than ya think.

One thing when I played the PBM games that I played back in the day, was the anticipation of the turn results. Did everything go according to plan? Did everyone else's turns work out as well, so something that had been in planning stages for months actually worked out? Then there was the fact that someone got their results back first, usually DAYS before anyone else, so the phone lines burned up. Sadly, thinking back, I would have spent less on the long-distance calls and more on the turns *hehe*. See, hindsight is pretty good. Oh, and these were ALL actual PBM games, none of that submit orders and get the results back in two days.

Too many games had times where I ran inconsistent turn orders, results came back

and it's like WTF happened....oh crap. One game, the GM even stopped my order process, since one early order just screwed the entire turn. That was nice of him, but I had been playing it for many years, and I did appreciate that.

The main thing missed, nowadays, is all the people you ran across in the games back then. Knew SOOOO many people from so many games. Still talk to a few of them, but have lost touch with the majority. Kinda like retiring from the military - *miss the folks, not the BS.*

Daniel Fisher

Hello Charles

Dropping a line so that you don't feel your words fall into an abyss. I appreciate what you guys are doing with social media and S&D magazine, but the industry itself needs a serious revamp, if we ever hope to bring new people aboard. Some of the pictures and the games I read about feel so 60's-70s, that I find it hard to appeal to any young players. They do not even appeal to me, who was playing them back in the 90s. I am one of those who remained in the gaming hobby, in general, although not so much in PBM, in particular. So, I have seen the developments in the last 35 years of my gaming life. Of all its various forms I am into (like computer gaming, board gaming, role playing, online gaming, etc.), I feel that only PBM remained "stagnant." New games are coming out every day. PBEM needs much better graphics, easy to use player interfaces instead of order forms, more computerisation of even hand moderated games, new modern gaming designs and more. In one of the gaming groups I am into on FB, I noticed a young gamer the other day posting a meme about the "tribes" of gamers depending on their favourite

game. The very last category were people who played a game that came out in 2013 or before, and were comically characterised, as "old men," since the 2013 game design was already considered obsolete. Obviously an old man, too, according to the meme, I then thought to myself, how many currently up and running PBEMs were designed and produced **after** 2013? The vast majority of the games I read about in S&D seem 80s and 90s design that even old PBEMers grew bored of. And to follow up with a hard question: *If the will and the resources to modernise the PBEM industry exist, will the investment actually be worth it?*

Cheers,
Makis Xiroyannis

Charles,

Good approach. Here's what jumped into my thoughts, as I read your request for help.

Anticipation of receiving and reading my next PBM turn in the mail was one of the greatest thrills that I enjoyed in my gaming hobby, back in the 1970s and 80s. With all of the changes to PBM since then, that has not changed. If I were to find I was no longer having the sense of urgency about a due or near due turn, then I would immediately consider how I was playing the game, or look at why I remain in that game.

Glenn Harrold



Gal-Tac Galaxy #129 Update and Rumor Sheet NUMBER ONE

All statements provably true, for an arbitrarily defined value of "true."

Published RIGOROUSLY and REGULARLY from our Secret HQ on the CAPITAL WORLD OF THE GALAXY, DAVE PRIME

The Empire Formerly Known as Dave, aka Dave II, announced today a sweeping research program designed to provide the Daveian fleets with an insurmountable qualitative edge. Skipping over TL2 and jumping straight to TL3, the bold move means nearly no military spending for the next several time periods, leaving the empire vulnerable to raiders. Speculation that the announcement was in fact a trick designed to encourage raiders, who would be destroyed by ultra-efficient defending fleets, was quickly dismissed by insiders in the Daveian government, with one off-the-record source saying quote Dave isn't that smart, end quote.

Diplomatic efforts to contact the mysterious and enigmatic Pondsosa empire failed, after repeated missions could find no trace of the empire. A visibly intoxicated diplomat explained that they thought they were looking for the Ponderosa, and had spent weeks scouring the taverns and brothels of Nevada on Old Earth searching for the Cartwright family, before a local barmaid weary of rebuffing the advances of alien diplomats with incorrectly-

shaped genitalia for her species informed the party that the Ponderosa was fictional, that the Cartwrights would be long dead in any event, and that the beer spilled onto the briefing dossier had blotted the name, and that the diplomats were looking for the Pondsosans.

A spokesbeing for the Ekroth Empire, in a sullen news conference displaying very little humor and no open bar, denounced reports that their frigates keep being vaporized by, quote, "goddamn annoying little bastard pirate fighters," end quote, saying that there were no pirates and that there are no frigates and that no battles have or ever will take place. A pirate spokesman contacted at a local bar indicates that the second of these propositions may be correct, now.

WAR breaks out between Star Force and Valkyrie! That's what we heard, anyway. My cousin's sister knows a guy who does the repo work for the cleaning company that gets the bloodstains off of the Star Force cruisers' upholstery after battles, and he said that she said that they said they were going to buy a boat, so they must be making hella loot, and that means a war must have started. Makes sense to *THIS* reporter. Of course, it's after 10 AM, and this reporter is very drunk.

MORE UPDATES TO COME, WHEN I GET PAID FOR THESE!!!!

Luty Hayes



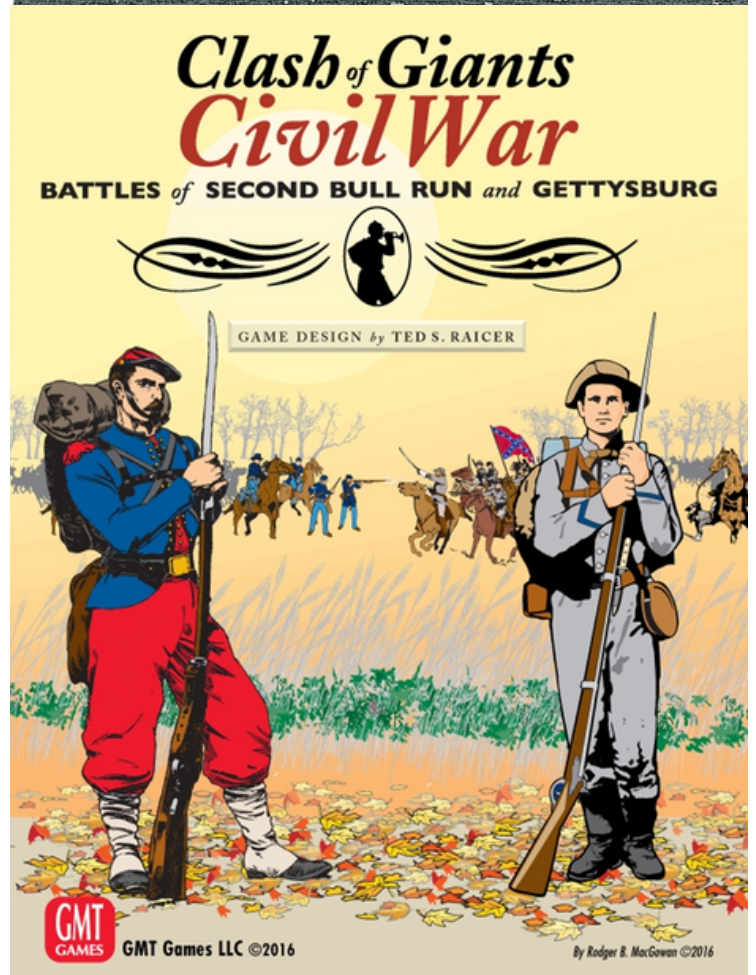
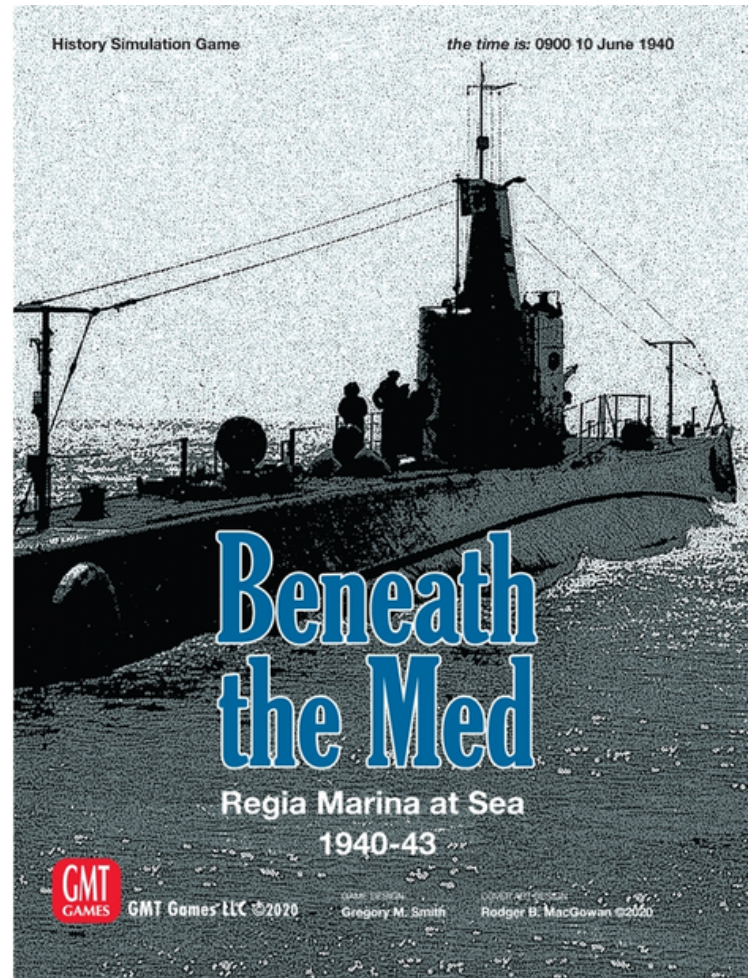
Oooh, some thoughts Charles....

PBM has always been one of the most intriguing, thought provoking and engaging of hobbies, and to some extent this still continues (whether by e-turns on snail mail). The big, ongoing challenge is the attraction of new players who see this as a viable alternative to the plethora of instant, online games that have developed with the rise of the internet over the last twenty years.

I don't have any answers btw, but I still play PBM because it's a relaxed, friendly hobby that fits in more with my life (and family, and work, and every other demand - when I want to put my feet up!) than almost anything else, and in an odd way is very relaxing (apart from when you've just had your head handed to you in Adventurer Kings or one of several other games I'm in).

I do wonder if marketing PBM needs to focus more on how it fits in, especially if your joystick thumbs aren't quite as fast as they used to be...but your strategy can still get you a win...or at the very least, some new friends :)

Jon Hughes



Time Wasters

The Squandering of a Precious Commodity

Charles Mosteller



The letter "P" in PBM stands for "Play." Perhaps, instead, it should be changed to "Perspective." Keep that in mind, as I set about the task at hand, which is to spare the term "time wasters" from the undeserved ignominy of getting buried in the sands of time, never to be seen nor heard from, again.

As the current reigning authority in all of play by mail gaming on the fine art of wasting time (I publish a newsletter whose primary focus is upon PBM, after all), I think that I can probably find one or two things to say on this subject.

Don't take my word for it, though. Let's put it to the test. What do you say? Are you up for a run through the brambles? Don't be shy. *Step right on up, because here we go!*

So, why do people waste the time of GMs of BM games? Why not save everyone, and especially the GM, the headache of going to a bunch of trouble to incorporate you and your character(s), your kingdom, your position, your empire, your whatever it is into a PBM game, when you're not even gonna bother to stick with it? I mean, let's get right to the meat of the matter. If we're gonna run through the brambles and play with thorns, let's not beat around the bush.

It's sad. It's terrible. It's tragic. It's shitty! That's a pretty accurate characterization, wouldn't you say? Does the average, typical would-be PBM gamer even have a clue how much time and energy and effort that PBM GMs sink into their creations? *No, probably not.*



At a bare minimum, couldn't those that sign up to give PBM games a try at least have the basic courtesy and fundamental human decency to give PBM GMs a heads up that they have decided to no longer play in a game that they have "clearly abandoned?"

Sure. That doesn't seem to much to ask, does it? I mean, that's not really asking all that much, is it? I don't think so.

Of course, right about now, Sean Cleworth of Ilkor: Dark Rising might well be sitting way over there in South Africa, wondering why I quit sending in turn orders for my character in that game? Of course, in fairness to Sean, what with the power grid in South Africa imploding and rolling blackouts are commonplace (and planned), he likely has far more overwhelming concerns than whether this player or that one intend to continue playing a game or not (even if it is his game).

And even if I had sent turns in with religious fervor, far more pressing issues would dwarf such meager considerations. Not that playing in a game or moderating a gamer are meager, insignificant, or trivial things. Rather, all of our respective lives are a never-ending exercise in balancing and juggling countless different considerations. There are ever and always countervailing competing priorities. *That's life.*

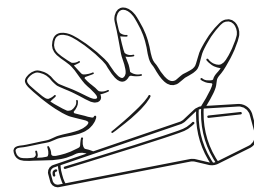
And life trumps games. Granted, none of us have to like it, but that we may not like it doesn't change the reality of it. It is axiomatic, and goes without saying, that life trumps games.

Some PBM games are automated. Some are fully automated (Aren't they?), whereas others are not fully automated (Right, John?). Or maybe not fully automated after setup.

Since the dawn of PBM, players have come and gone. Some PBMs stay a while. Some even stay for decades on end. Some of the longtimers are intermittent players. I first started playing Hyborian Warback in the 1980s. I currently play Hyborian War. Yet, I have not played non-stop that entire span of time. These days, I tend to write about PBM more than I actually play it. *What a waste of time that is, huh?*

PBM players are odd people. Not all of them, but many of them unquestionably are (pay no attention to my eyes drifting in the direction of Wayne Smith). And do you know who else are odd people?

PBM GMs.



...Drops mic...



How many times in the history of play by mail gaming have PBM GMs just suddenly stopped processing turns, whether temporarily or permanently? It's OK. Go ahead and say, **"Amen!"**

As far as that goes, how many PBM editors and PBM publishers have intended to publish issues, or entire PBM magazines and newsletters, that they then either publish late, or never publish, at all? Surely, I'm not the only one to ever fall into *that* category, am I?

Yeah, the Big PBM Churchhouse sure is beginning to fall quiet. Lots of sheepish grins greet me, as I look out over the gaming congregation. I'm pretty sure that somewhere in this sermon from the PBM Mount that a point is being made and underscored (perhaps even several).

If we're gonna judge, then shouldn't we judge righteous judgment? Here's the thing, though, none of us are perfect, and none of us are ideally suited to judge righteous judgment, for that very reason.

We're all human. We all have lives. We all make mistakes. We all change our minds. *We just do!*

On the PBM GM end of things, let's quickly narrow the field. How many PBM GMs run PBM games without interruptions of any kind?

More than one has stopped running, at times, only to reappear weeks, months, or years later. Anybody know any that fall into *that* category?

I do.

But you know what? Sometimes, people come back a lot stronger and even better than when they made their initial appearance on the PBM scene. And PBM isn't any the worse for it, all things said and considered.

But that's just it - not all things are always said and considered. Frustrations bubble to the surface, and patience gives way to impatience.

One of the great beauties about life in human form is that it comes with all kinds of different opportunities at gaining perspective. That's something that I think that none of us can ever have too much of. Why? Because perspective allows one to have and to know and to understand in a much better way things than would otherwise be possible. Our world, our life, our game - *they are not the only one in town!*

And by game, I don't mean just and only game. I mean *thing*. Our lives are always bubbling with all kinds of different things to do - *some good, some bad, some indifferent*. Life doesn't really care about that one game, or that one turn, or even really about PBM as a whole.

I have a sister. I have three of them, actually, but this one that I'm talking about, right now, a guy asked her out on a date, one time. Come the appointed hour, he never showed up. *A no show!* Man, what an asshole, right?

Fast forward in life, to some time later on, and my sister finds out that the very same guy that stood her up had died. Really and truly, he died before he could ever take her on that date. But the very nerve of him! He never even took the time to call.

So, a person goes from being angry and upset towards someone else to feeling terrible about themselves. This is a good example of why perspective that is missing from our life is necessary for a better understanding of a given situation.

What about when you're young, and you fall in love? Or what about when you're young, and you become a slave to the gods of testosterone? Or what about when you unexpectedly lose your job? Or what about when you're depressed? What about when you're having suicidal thoughts? Do any of those count as *valid* reasons for a PBM game to fall from the pinnacle of one's attention to a secondary or even tertiary level of importance?

When my Mama was dying, and when she died, I continued sending turns in for my PBM games. But countless other ways, it scrambled my mind and my life and my feelings and any claim to sanity that I might at one time have had.

As I have stated many times over the years, PBM is a **HOBBY INTEREST** of mine. I can play it or not play it. I can write about it or not write about it. In no instance do I ever ascribe to it a greater degree of importance than it **ACTUALLY HAS**. Don't make the mistake of thinking that this sermon which isn't is about to

come to an end. *Most assuredly, it's not.*

Someone suddenly stopping their play and their participation in a PBM game is truly a first world problem. It's definitely not a crisis, not in any real definition of the word. But that doesn't make it any the less a disappointment.

And I don't mean for just the GM, either - *though that, too!*

When all is said and done, though, what are you gonna do about it? You can try to do a better job of sifting the wheat from the chaff, but sometimes, the wheat, itself, spoils. People change. Priorities change. Life changes on a dime, and my own experience is that life doesn't usually ask our permission nor our consent.



The purpose that we try to assign to our life, and the importance that we attach to things in our life, are not always held in equal regard nor with equal intensity and fervor, as we, ourselves, assign and attach to such. Even in instances where it may, at first, seem to be the case, sometimes such regard and intensity and fervor prove to be short-lived. *Has no one ever heard that people can be fickle?*

People dropping out of games is a lot like people never even willing to give a game a try in the first place. They both have something in common. They're both a part of *actual* reality.

Me? I'm neither a pessimist nor an optimist. I'm more of a realist. It doesn't save me from all disappointment in life, but it saves me from quite a bit of both frustration and disappointment.

To the best of my knowledge and understanding, PBM gamers from all countries on the face of our planet that have played PBM games sometimes quit playing PBM games, and at times, it's as if they just drop off the face of the Earth. No explanation, no kiss my ass, no nothing. *Poof!* Gone. Just. Like. That!

Yet, life goes on. Now, whether a given game goes on or not, I suppose that it just plain depends. Some GMs have more patience than others. Some become more easily frustrated than others of their GMing ilk. Some take such things in stride more than others. And for some? It's not personal - *It's just business*. Just one facet of many of what trying to run a PBM game as a business is like. Like it, lump it, it doesn't matter. It's only one problem of many, and they don't have the luxury of wallowing in it and letting their frustration over it to dominate their thinking or sour their love for the art of GMing. Not all things in life are going to make sense, and other things which we can't make sense of, well, our perspective may not be as good as we might otherwise prefer.

PBM gaming has its fair share of introverts. I say that, as an introvert - *one who speaks from the perspective of a lifelong introvert*. My point is this: As a general rule of thumb, introverts have a habit of withdrawing from a range of activities that they have attempted, without feeling some great "need" to tell anyone. It kind of goes with the territory, no matter how much that some might wish (or even pray) that they would just say something to somebody, before pulling their D.B. Cooper disappearing acts. There's a saying - *Wish in one hand, shit in the other*. See which one fills up first.



If you don't know why someone just up and stops playing your game, why would you get frustrated at them? After all, by your own admission, you don't know the WHY that lies at the root of the reason that they suddenly are no more, where your game is concerned.

Are you walking in *their* shoes? Are you going through the rough spots of *their* life? When they're suffering from acute and prolonged depression, are *you* there for *them*? Or is all that matters in life your *game*?

Perspective, people. I'm talking about perspective. Personally, I don't play PBM games to worship a game. My life doesn't revolve around them. At times, I miss turns. Other times, I drop games. Do you know what's even worse than both of those, though? There have been countless, just countless, times in my life when I didn't even try a game, at all. If someone is even willing to *try* your game, you really should count yourself both *blessed* and *fortunate*.

In fairness, though, it really must suck being a GM, and particularly a GM who's a one-man show, knowing that players have little in the way of loyalty to the game that you bust your ass to provide to them as a viable form of entertainment. *Sorry sons of bitches!*

Let's not pull punches, here. The Big PBM Churchhouse is one of verbal fire and oratorical brimstone, right? How can people be so damned thoughtless, as to leave their GM in the lurch? I say this as the individual who couldn't ever seem to work the kinks out of getting the original Suspense & Decision magazine published in a timely and enduring manner. *Talk about a son of a bitch!*

Would this be a bad time to pass the collection plate around? Remember, folks - *Always give from the heart!* It's in the heart, you see.

This ain't Oz, and I ain't handing out hearts, today. And whatever you do, don't go peeking behind the curtains. There's no telling what Richard Lockwood might be doing back there.

My point being, all innuendo aside? That no matter what happens, whether GM or player or company, don't lose your sense of humor along the way. Stock up on tolerance. I hear that they're having a fire sale on patience, this week. *Oh, wait! Nevermind. How silly of me!* Patience is free, every day of every week.

So, what's *your* excuse?

I'm trying to end on a high note here. Looks like more than a few of you skipped the collection plate, this week. *And that's OK.*

In a separate but related (maybe in my own mind, but definitely related) story, did you know that there are people who subscribed to PBM Unearthed, yet which ever read it, which never browse it, which never even download it? *Such travesty! Such unmitigated gall! Such utter normalcy!*

Wait! Did I just say *normalcy*? I did.

Say, what?! Relax. Calm down, people. That ain't the sky that just hit you in the head, Chicken Little. It's just an acorn of truth. Everything's gonna be all right.

Well, everything except Lockwood. Richard Lockwood is, arguably, an imperfect man. Yet, from my perspective, he's a national and transnational treasure. If it weren't for him, PBM Unearthed might well have already disappeared from your not-so-favorite digital newsstand.

For he is the gift that just keeps on giving. His greatest gift is his presence. His personality is one of the Crown Jewels of PBM. ***All hail!***



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A Long Overdue Update

Richard Lockwood

Hello chap,

Here's a quick update:



SCHMRPG update (that acronym will eventually catch on!)

So, what's been going on in the world of Single Character Hand Moderated Rôle Playing Games, or specifically, the ones I play – **The Isles** and **Ilkor : Dark Rising?**

Let's start with Ilkor. Nothing. Sean (Gads) is in Cape Town, South Africa, and at the moment is having **massive problems with power outages**, and is unable to process any turns until further notice. He's hoping to have a solar power electricity supply in place by the end of February, so, fingers crossed, Ilkor can get up and running again. I've been thoroughly enjoying it, and I need to know if Natasha and Sir Albert can make a clean getaway. *Good luck getting that sorted, Sean!* There's a lot of work gone into it, and the players were really enjoying it before this unfortunate interruption.

The Isles has also had a bit of a break, as Roy has also had **real life issues to deal with**. However, all is back up and running, and in the downtime he's found time to create some **lovely maps** for a couple of areas.

All sorts of exciting things have gone off (pre-hiatus). A merchant's house exploded, and a ship was looted and burned in the harbour.

Post-hiatus, there's been a **massive brawl in the North Gate Inn**, leaving three mercenaries of Shadowwalker's Beggardly Company dead.

My man Ælthric has been keeping his head down, just working at the Market Inn, taking a fair wage (for an outcast), and a few silvers in tips. However, the other day, it all kicked off... Ælthric helped roll a **new barrel of ale** in from the yard, tapped and vented it, and started serving it – after taking a mug for himself. (For testing purposes, obviously).

That was an error.

People started exploding, glowing, moving in slow motion, and then a **demonic dragon appeared from the ceiling** and roared directly at him... what the hell was in that beer? A man threw up over Ælthric's boots as he ran screaming from the inn to the privy in the yard, where he narrowly avoided soiling himself. *Hallucinations, surely?*

After some time, sitting, contemplating the possibility of standing up (and probably having time to finish the Guardian crossword), he returned to the bar, to discover a young man breathing his last – punched in the head as he **screamed about his own hallucinations**. Nothing the healer could do. *The young man died.*

The small hours of the morning saw Ælthric and Evris, the landlord, on a cart, with a **mysterious local lady and her dog**, heading out of town. We shall see what the future holds... All being well, Evris's new pub can be a success, and Ælthric can continue his hitherto blameless and excitement-free life as a barman...



HEROIC FANTASY™

a play-by-mail game of
dungeon exploration
and adventure

of Or
-945-69
Rick
(C121)
(C140) Fyke: DE
(C141) Tom: Ogre, arrives from Ea
character 'Tom'?"
(C165) Eight of Coins: DEAD Male
(C209) Death: DEAD Male Goblin.
Characters who left here:
- (C16) Frenzy: Male Fairy, gives Gold to (C69) Mulizza Tremor
West
- (C69) Mulizza Tremorstone: Female Dwarf, grabs prizes, moves

Entrance Room
Visible Doors:
North=25 -- Leads to Hexagonal Room
East=25 -- Leads to Grimtooth's Emporium
South=25 -- Leads to Well-Hidden Room
West=25 -- Leads to Crummy Room
(C2) Hijinx: Male Dwarf Fighter, enters this level.
Str=30 Con=40 Gold=2000
(4) Elonar: Female Elf Magic-User, enters this level.
Str=20 Con=25
(5) M. Henry: Female Elf, arrives from South. "Please be
ner player character."
Elonir: Female Elf Magic-User, enters this level.
Con=25
Rifax: Male Elf Fighter, enters this level.
Con=25
Logan1: Male Human Fighter, enters this level.
Con=30
Maxe: Male Human Fighter, enters this level.
Con=25
Male Human Fighter, enters this level.

OLD SCHOOL

PBM ENTERTAINMENT!

**JOIN
TODAY!**

Rick Loomis PBM
rickloomispbm.com

For some reason, people seem to think that all of the time that has lapsed between the golden era of play by mail gaming and today even counts, at all. It doesn't, of course.

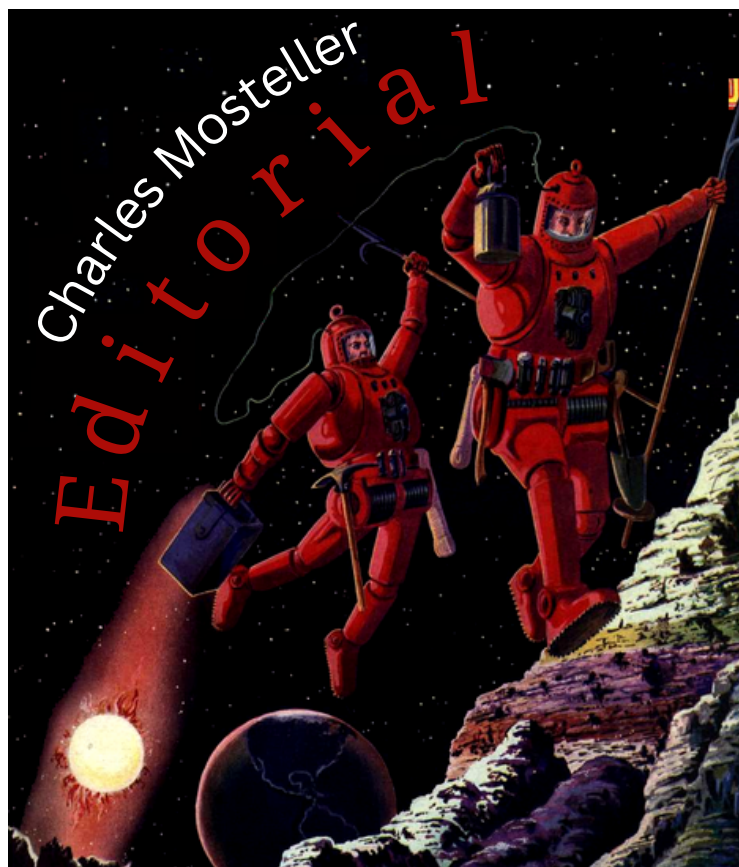
Such things as PBM gaming building towards a new golden era take time – *more time than many of us are willing to give it to succeed*. For some reason, we think that we need to be a part of it. But what if such a new golden era was not meant for us, for you and I?

In the early morning hours of today, the date of publication for this issue of **PBM Unearthed**, a nice little discussion about PBM was taking place in the **PBM Discord** (in the pbm-general-chat channel). In fact, I wasn't even aware that it was taking place. I stumbled upon it later on this morning, after the fact. *Do you think that I even got an invitation, though?*

The driving force in this particular PBM discussion was an individual who goes by the moniker of **JulianTheApostate**, though the actual spark that caused the fire appears to have been the verbal handiwork of **FenriSK**.

Other participants in this collective lament about the current state of PBM included **Raven Zachary**, **PlagueBearer**, **wraith**, **Fungus** and **werewolf_punch**. *But wait a minute!* Aren't most of these individuals working on new games of their own, be they of the PBM variety or otherwise? Some certainly are.

Of the major existing commercial PBM companies that remain, which of them are actively working on the development of new games? **Middle-earth Games** might be (Clint's all hush-hush, right now), but what about **Rolling Thunder Games**, **KJC Games**, **Reality Simulations, Inc.**, **Harlequin Games**, **Rick Loomis PBM**, and **Madhouse UK**? I'm not trying to leave anybody out. Rather, I'm merely trying to make – *and underscore* – a point. To a large degree, the wheels of new game innovation



have ground to a halt. *Not entirely, but mostly.*

And of the new games or game variants that have come along in recent years, how many have been aimed at the postal games market, whether in whole or in part?

I would say that the big PBM companies focus more on their profit margins, these days, but with **RSI** having never raised the price of any of its PBM games, I think that I'll hold off on saying that.

Back in the old days of several decades ago, there was a gold rush into PBM gaming. Wouldn't it be nice to see that, again? Not that I saw the vast majority of it, back when I first came onto the PBM scene.

The dawn of the commercial PBM sector occurred when **Flying Buffalo, Inc.** published **Nuclear Destruction** for play, which was in 1970. As a comparison point, four of NASA's six manned moon landings occurred *after* the dawn of commercial play by mail gaming. Did you even realize that? Don't take my word for it – *Look it up!*

There are numerous things which stifle innovation in PBM gaming. Apparently, where commercial PBM companies are concerned, the perceived potential (or lack thereof) for profitability still matters. Why sink a bunch of money down what may well turn out to be a rabbit hole of monetary loss?

And for some PBM companies, there are intellectual property restrictions which impede their ability to innovate at will. Me? I would very much like to see a Silmarillion game variant put out by **Middle-earth Games**. To do that, though, would require permission, no doubt.

And **Reality Simulations, Inc.** is limited in its ability to innovate by switching over to sending players **Hyborian War** turn results out via e-mail. It has to do with contractual obligations, according to a response that I received from the President of RSI many years back (and which I posted on [The Hyborian Tome](#) website under a section titled, [Temple of the God-Queen](#)).

All commercial PBM companies want to make money, but none of them have bottomless pockets to squander their limited resources on developing new PBM games that may not end up getting played enough to warrant the cost, in terms of financial considerations and time invested.

Developing new PBM games that don't pan out could well prove to be instrumental in driving them out of business – *not something that any of them tend to strive for.*

So, what are PBM gamers, both old and new, alike, to do?

Well, back in the old days, most PBM companies were actually fairly small affairs, with many being just one man or two-man (or woman) companies. Back then, individuals took matters into their own hands. They didn't wait on existing PBM companies to do all of the innovating. Frequently, it was individuals, and not companies, on the cutting edge of innovation in the play by mail industry.

The quickest and most viable path to return PBM gaming to a new golden era likely lies with individuals, and not with **Old Guard PBM companies**. If past is prologue, particularly recent past, why would any of us be inclined to believe that established commercial PBM companies would be at the forefront of a new cutting edge for PBM gaming?

If they were, though, then from my perspective, over the last couple of decades or so, British PBM companies would be far more likely than their American counterparts to ride a new wave of PBM game development.

The modern space race taking place between **Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Sir Richard Branson** benefits from having billionaires that invest heavily in such undertakings. Billionaires, however, have never seemed to take much interest in PBM gaming. *Which may help explain why they're billionaires and we're not, huh?*

It's a sad reflection upon the modern day PBM scene that its state of innovation has sunk to the point where at least one incarcerated individual is ahead of the curve. *Somebody's got to lead, though.*

I'm talking about **Daveed Fa'ear** and his PBM game, **ExIsles**. Visually, **Roy Pollard** of **The Isles PBeM RPG** is one of the leaders in PBM gaming, now. What other more established PBM companies "can't do" or "won't do," these gentlemen are actually doing. *And it's nice to see.*

If new players started pouring back into PBM gaming, what PBM company do you think would prove to be the most nimble? For my part, I'll go out on a limb and say **Madhouse UK**. Why? I think that **Steve Tierney** has a really good record on running a wide variety of different games down through the years, and because he's still really engaged with the business of processing turn results, and the capability to run turns electronically or in paper format does not elude him, even now.