

# PBM

Issue 29

# Unearthed

*The Mysterious Realm of Play-By-Mail Gaming*

***29th Withering Issue***



March 13th, 2023

***What PBM this way cometh?***

PlayByMail.Net

# PBM UNEARTHED

The Mysterious Realm of Play By Mail Gaming

## ISSUE #29

March 13th, 2023 Issue

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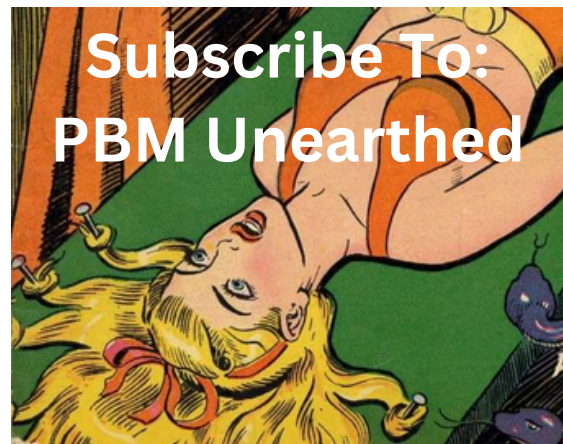
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Charles Mosteller

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**Daemonrift 3**  
The Armageddon War



## PBM QUOTE

*"I think the main reason PBM'ing is consistently underestimated is that by the very nature of our hobby, we lack visibility."*

**Dr. R. Terry Cale**

Flagship Editor (U.S. Edition)

Issue #8 - Autumn 1985

# Suspense & Decision

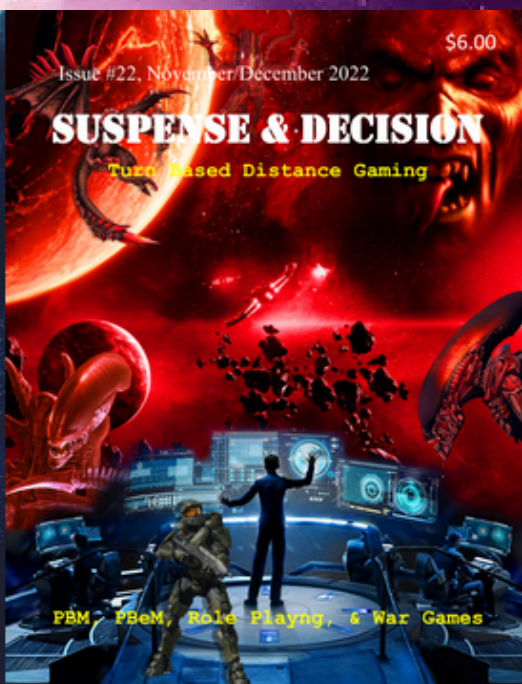
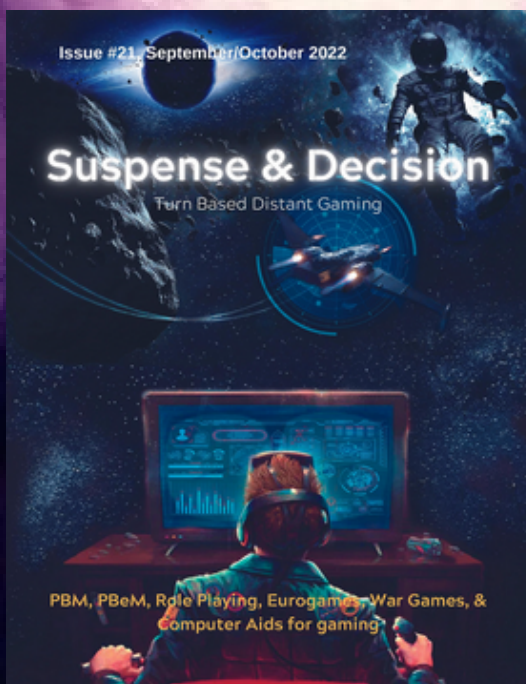


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The Editor is Jon Capps.

Our Journey





# Aromatic Lunchbox

Andy Bentley



No2 Son, five-years-old, currently starts every sentence with "Yeah but...".

*"Yeah but Daddy, can you look at my Minecraft House? Yeah but Daddy, can I have some breakfast? Yeah but Daddy, how is everything actually here, like the grass and the stars?"* How have I managed to nurture such contempt that he feels the need to contradict me even when I'm not speaking? Why are all the tricky existential questions pre-coffee? Why all the fucking questions?

I'm not very good at carving out time for indoor activities. I can wander out of the house for hours or days to pursue any physical hobby; gym, walking, cycling. My absence goes unquestioned and unnoticed. Any activities that involve body parts from the neck up prove much more difficult.

Availability is a major challenge. Need to know if I've done that thing yet that I said I'd do weeks ago? I'm within shouting distance and you can interrupt my train of thought to ask me any time. And the answer's still no, I haven't, but I will do it soon. Need to know how to build a Nether Portal in Minecraft? I'll stop what I'm doing to search the internet for that, no problem. Being the sole purveyor of the internet in our house, it would be selfish not to.

I can surf over some of these interruptions and get back in the groove in a couple of minutes. Some are clearly going to need me to close the laptop lid and throw my own dreams and desires out of the window for the next thirty minutes or more... *"Yeah but Daddy, what is a googol times a googol?"*



Guilt is also a factor. I'm fighting it right now. There's some washing up to do. (As a side note for my American friends, we do have dishwashers in the UK, but I prefer the hand-washed, artisanal approach. I've found that the only people that think dishwashers are a labour-saving device are those that don't load or unload dishwashers.). If there are ANY household jobs that are within line of sight, I can't relax enough to concentrate.

I overcome reminders by trying to restrict my field of vision; books, hats, boxes, bags. *"Yeah but Daddy, what are all those bruises on your legs?"*

Credibility is the biggest obstacle though. I cannot get anyone, not one single person in my real-life sphere, to take PBM seriously. If you share this experience, you'll have your own views on why this is. I'll try and share my thoughts on this, based on zero evidence and shovel loads of bias. You're welcome.

I'm from the north of England. We have hobbies which are for escaping our families. We also have hobbies that result in us feeling much colder and

damper than if we stayed in our cold, damp houses. We then 'feel the benefit' when we return indoors. It's cold and damp in the north of England for 92% of the year; we feel the benefit a lot. There are a couple of very popular hobbies which fit this specification. Sitting by a stinking canal, using a long stick to dangle string into the water in the hope of pulling an animal out, then returning it to the water. Using a slightly different stick to hit a small white ball round a contrived version of nature between 18 different holes. Neither of these hobbies, expressed in polite company, would raise an eyebrow. They occur outside, other people see these hobbies happening frequently. There is no great conceptual barrier to understanding.

Other hobbies which are accepted, but viewed with a little suspicion, are pastimes like reading fiction, painting or any activity in the outdoors which doesn't involve the use of a stick.

If you are under forty and you express an interest in video gaming where fantastic imagery is pummelled into your visual cortex, you'll be viewed as unmarriedable, but with a wistful look by the married.

There are other hobbies which involve learning. These are generally understood yet reviled. Don't tell people you've been learning unless you've got your spit proof jacket on.

Yet, tell someone you're into PBM games? Wow.

Explaining PBM is the easy part (I don't need to explain it to you. You know the score.). Or rather, expressing it is the easy part. Explaining indicates a level of increased understanding by the recipient. This is rarely the outcome.

Have you ever watched the unfurling facial expressions of someone with the emerging

realisation that you've recently taken a shit in their lunchbox? I haven't. But I DO know what it looks like. I've tried to explain PBM games to people. The look is the same. The three-phase cognitive dissonance transitioning from "What is that awful smell coming from my lunchbox?" to "What is this thing in my lunchbox?!" to "Why have you done this smelly thing in my lunchbox?!?" would be a joy to behold, if you weren't beholden to explain it further.

The crux of the matter is that the arena of PBM is the skull. The axiomatic pieces which are synthesised into imagination are a most improbable conglomeration; a rule book, a spreadsheet, a text file. They are not the solid foundations of most imaginative works, like novels or Tik Tok videos. How can they result in such a rich shared world? It is an imaginative leap too far for most. I don't even believe it, when I see other PBM games. I shouldn't expect this from others.

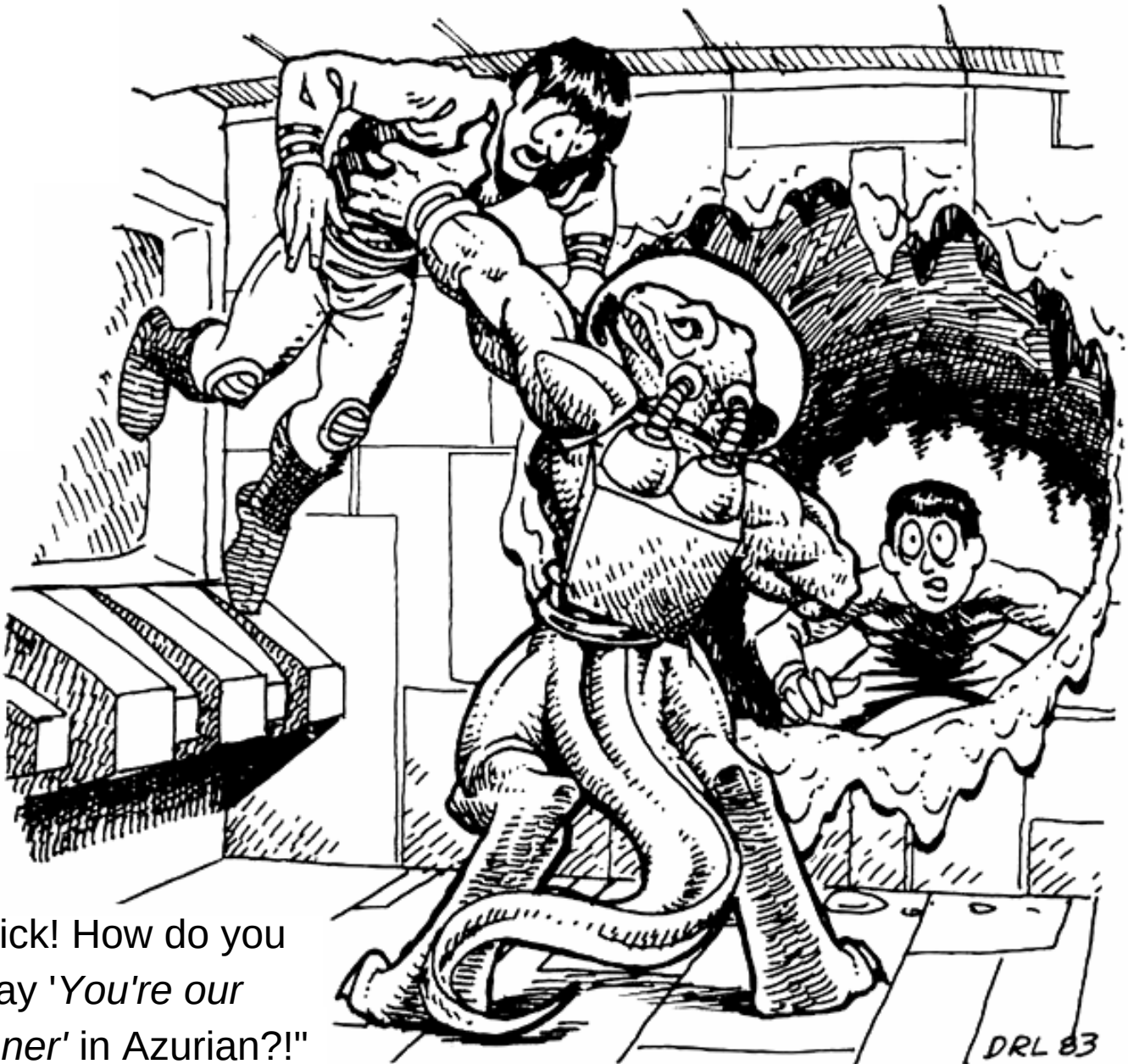
Faced with my triad of impairments - Availability, Guilt and Credibility - I can see no solution. I'm a coward, so I'll continue skulking upstairs. I'll weave my Tribenet turns and woefully inadequate Takamo turns between all my other mundane obligations. I do have an idea or two to eke out a little more PBM time though... "Yeah but Daddy, why is there a poo poo in my school bag?"



# Galac-Tac

[talisman-games.com](http://talisman-games.com)

*A galactic-scale strategic wargame!*



"Quick! How do you  
say 'You're our  
Prisoner' in Azurian?!"

# Play By Mail Game Engine Archive

Michael Henderson

A few days ago @zkline joined the PlayByMail.net Discord server, and asked, *"I wonder what other PBEMs might have code available?"*

There are many games out there on Source Forge, Git Lab, and Git Hub. I suspect that there are more hiding in folders on old hard drives.

I was surprised to find "playbymail" was available on GitHub. **Play By Mail (github.com)** is now up and ready to start a catalog of existing game engines.

I've started moving the code that I've accumulated to it, and I'd be happy to add links to any code archives that you know of.

There are other users on GitHub that have game code. I'll link to those as they surface.

To help me find those, I've started an issue tracker for "new" code. If you come across a code archive, please open a request and I'll get it added to the main page.



<https://github.com/mdhender>

*Q. Did you know that Michael Henderson made 882 contributions on GitHub in the last year?*

# The Glory of Kings



## SCRAMBLE FOR EMPIRE



A TURN-BASED VICTORIAN COLONIAL  
STEAMPUNK WARGAME CAMPAIGN, PLAYED BY E-MAIL

## ROME IS BURNING



A TURN-BASED GAME SET IN THE ROMAN  
EMPIRE OF THE 1st CENTURY AD



**Guild House**  
This square is the guild house of one of the in-game guilds. Walk onto it for a description. Issue an 'L 2' order on it for more info on the guild.

**Shallow Water**  
Wast-deep or shallower water fills this square. Some combat modifiers and low damage are possible. The square can be moved over as if it were 'open'.

**Bottomless Pit**  
A terrible black pit fills the square. This terrain is impassable and should be treated like a wall.

**Portcullis**  
A stout iron portcullis is here. Normally, these are open and can be treated as an open square. Rarely, they are closed. Look around the area for more info.

**Bed**  
There is a bed in this square. See the rooms 'look' description for the state of the bed. The square can be moved over as if it were 'open'.

**Stairs Down**  
There is a flight of stairs leading down. See the rooms 'look' description for more info. The square can be moved over as if it were 'open'.

**Stairs Up**  
There is a flight of stairs leading up. See the rooms 'look' description for more info. The square can be moved over as if it were 'open'.

**Courtyard/Market**  
This square is part of a courtyard or market area. Buy and Sell orders can be issued here as shown in "Courtyards" in this guide.

**Locked Door**  
There is a locked door here. The square cannot be entered or passed until a rogue has unlocked the door.

**Magical Trader**  
One of the enigmatic Magical Traders is here. Magical Traders very seldom move. All Buy and Sell orders can be issued while on a Magical Trader.

**Wall / Sheer Rock**  
This square is completely blocked by a wall, or sheer rock and cannot be entered or passed through.

**Unlocked Door**  
This square is filled with an unlocked doorway. It can be treated exactly like an open square for movement and combat purposes.

**Crawlspace**  
This corridor is a rough low crawlspace. It can be treated like an open square, although hidden combat modifiers with long weapons do apply.

**Treasure Chest**  
There is a treasure chest here. You can attempt to open it using a 'Z 60' order, although this can be very dangerous for the untrained. The square can be moved over as if it were 'open'.



MADCENTRAL.CO.UK

# DUNGEONWORLD

## The Largest PBM Adventure Game Ever Made!

**DungeonWorld is a character-based multiplayer turn-based fantasy adventure game.**

It is set in an epic world full of monsters, mayhem, swords and sorcery.

You can play DungeonWorld completely for **FREE** with a single character, or play commercially with as many characters as you like.

Whichever way you choose, all players are in the same continuous shared world. It's the biggest game of its kind on earth! *Enjoy!*

**Private Land**  
This square marks the edge of some private land owned by a noble or lord. It costs 2 Move Points to cross. Issue an 'L 2' order for info on the owners name.

**Road**  
This square is a road. Travel on it costs 1 Move Point. Roads are useful for faster travel between cities and places of interest.

**City, Castle or Keep**  
This square is a city, castle or keep of some kind. It costs 1 Move Point to cross. Some of these can be entered. Issue an 'L 2' order to do so.

**Dungeon Entrance**  
This square is a Dungeon Entrance. It costs 1 Move Point to cross. Issue an 'L 2' order to enter the Dungeon.

**Magical Place**  
This square is a magical place of some kind. It costs 2 Move Points to cross. Issue an 'L 2' order on it for more info on the magical place.

**Broken Land**  
This terrain is a harsh open area covered in cracks, pits and ravines. It costs 3 Move Points to Cross.

**Town or Village**  
There is a town or village here. This square costs 1 Move Point to cross. Some of these squares act as limited traders. A few (but not many) can be entered using the 'L 2' order.

**Light Forest**  
This terrain type is woods or light forest. Hunting/Foraging is usually good here. Vision is reduced slightly if you end your turn in Light Forest. It costs 2 Move Points to cross.

**Steep Hills**  
This terrain is tough going. Steep Hills make for slow progress, but do increase your vision when you end your turn on them. They cost 4 Move Points to Cross.

**Gentle Hills**  
Pleasant rolling hills which slow progress a bit but increase vision when you end your turn on them. Gentle Hills cost 3 Move Points to cross.

**Heavy Forest**  
This sort of terrain is hard to travel and often teeming with danger. Heavy Forest decreases vision when you end your turn in it. It costs 3 Move Points to cross and can hide IDs of characters in it.

**Mountains**  
This terrain type is impassable. To cross a mountain range you must first find a pass of some kind.

**Open Land**  
Can be fields, farmland, wasteland or just about any other sort of open area you can imagine. Open Land costs 2 Move Points to cross.

**Body of Water**  
Water comes in the form of streams, lakes, shallow and deep rivers. It costs 4 Move Points to cross, although some types are impassable without a bridge or boat.

# The Isles - Turn 10

Richard Lockwood

So, Ælthric is leaving town, with his boss from the Market Inn. A mysterious lady, with whom he's been talking in the pub is on the cart with them. And her dog. Ælthric isn't quite sure whether the dog likes him or not. Growly bugger.

Still, it seems, from rumours that fire quicker than the bush telegraph, that his boss, Evris, is behind the poisoning at the Market Inn, but Ælthric knows that's not the case. He's sticking with Evris.

A turn that potentially could have been really dull ("get on the cart and go to Gate") came back described beautifully, and in great detail; "You find the nearest tree and fumble around a few moments before answering the call of nature. Looking up, you sense more than see the same big dog that set you to near shitting yourself in the wagon standing to one side of the tree with its haunches to you. Its head tilts to one side as if one of its golden eyes is watching you as you take your piss. As you turn and walk the few paces back to the camp, you see the dog trot across to your tree and sniff what you have produced.

You sit and decline another cup from Evris – For a few moments your vision blurs and sparkles again, perhaps another brief by-blow of that poison in the Inn? A glimmer of white and yellow sparkles behind the wagon, but as you tense it abates in an instant and is replaced by normal darkness.

"You well?" Evris asks, peering across the fire at you.

You nod your head, and draw your blanket a little tighter about you.

Ælthric, Evris and Nerris (mystery lady) arrive in Gate, a small town ruled by the Miners' Guild. This explains why Evris was hounded out of Ilanthor.

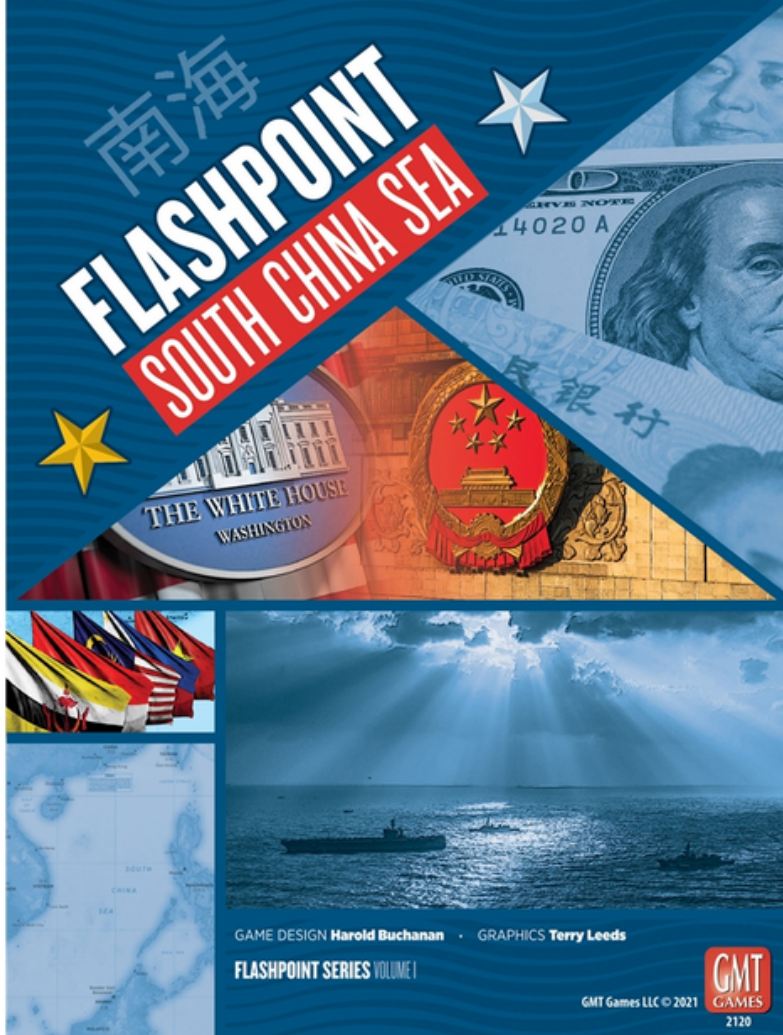
It looks like Evris and Ælthric are taking on the tavern – *Let's see what occurs!*





**PROBABLY the BEST  
PBM IN the  
WORLD** 

\*\* Photo courtesy of Sean Dillon \*\*





Alex Bardy - Editor & Layout  
 Guy Allen - Features Editor  
 Simon Neale - Reviews Editor



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# The Dinosaur That Is Play By Mail

## *Why The Internet Was Not An Existential Threat*



Did the Internet kill all play by mail games? Nope. Well, why not? Why can I still play Hyborian War and receive turn results via the postal service? How is that even possible, in this day and age?

Now, think about this. PBM games and PBM companies routinely went out of business, before the Internet ever even came along. Why is that?

Did the Internet destroy all gaming? Even today, gaming flourishes in many different forms. The Internet neither invented gaming, nor has it perfected it, nor has it destroyed it. How is it that the Internet is heaped with so much credit for killing play by mail gaming?

Is it the Internet's fault that so many PBM companies and GMs proved to

not be up to the task of adapting successfully to the Internet's arrival?

How quickly so many PBM companies and GMs were to discern opportunities and possibilities that the Internet brought with it, yet when all was said and done, they mostly fumbled the ball and bungled their attempts to successfully implement and bring to fruition these very same opportunities and possibilities.

Why is it that some PBM games, which are viewed by some to be dinosaurs from a bygone gaming era, managed to survive and continue processing turns, when so many other PBM games fell by the wayside or were abandoned?

People, of course, are free to believe whatever they want to believe.

Since I currently play in a game of Hyborian War, here in the present day and age of gaming, I can't help but to wonder what unique genius that Reality Simulations possesses, that enabled it to survive intact and still running PBM games, today, that it's run successfully for decades on end?

Was it some form of genius that enabled RSI to make this transition, without going out of business? Or is it more likely that RSI didn't actively undermine the entertainment model that it implemented decades ago?

If you are a PBM company and you have an entertainment model that works, and which has worked for years on end, does it make sense to knock the legs out from under an entertainment model that is a proven success? After all, that's *exactly* what many PBM companies and GMs chose to do.

It is important to keep in mind (and extremely relevant) that the arrival of the Internet did not strip any PBM companies or GMs of the ability to make decisions – *decisions that had direct bearings on their future success or failure.*

In the rush to transitioning from PBM games playable via the postal service to PBM games via e-mail, the World

Wide Web, and online interfaces, how many of those very same PBM companies and GMs made such transitions successfully? How is it that some did, but not others?

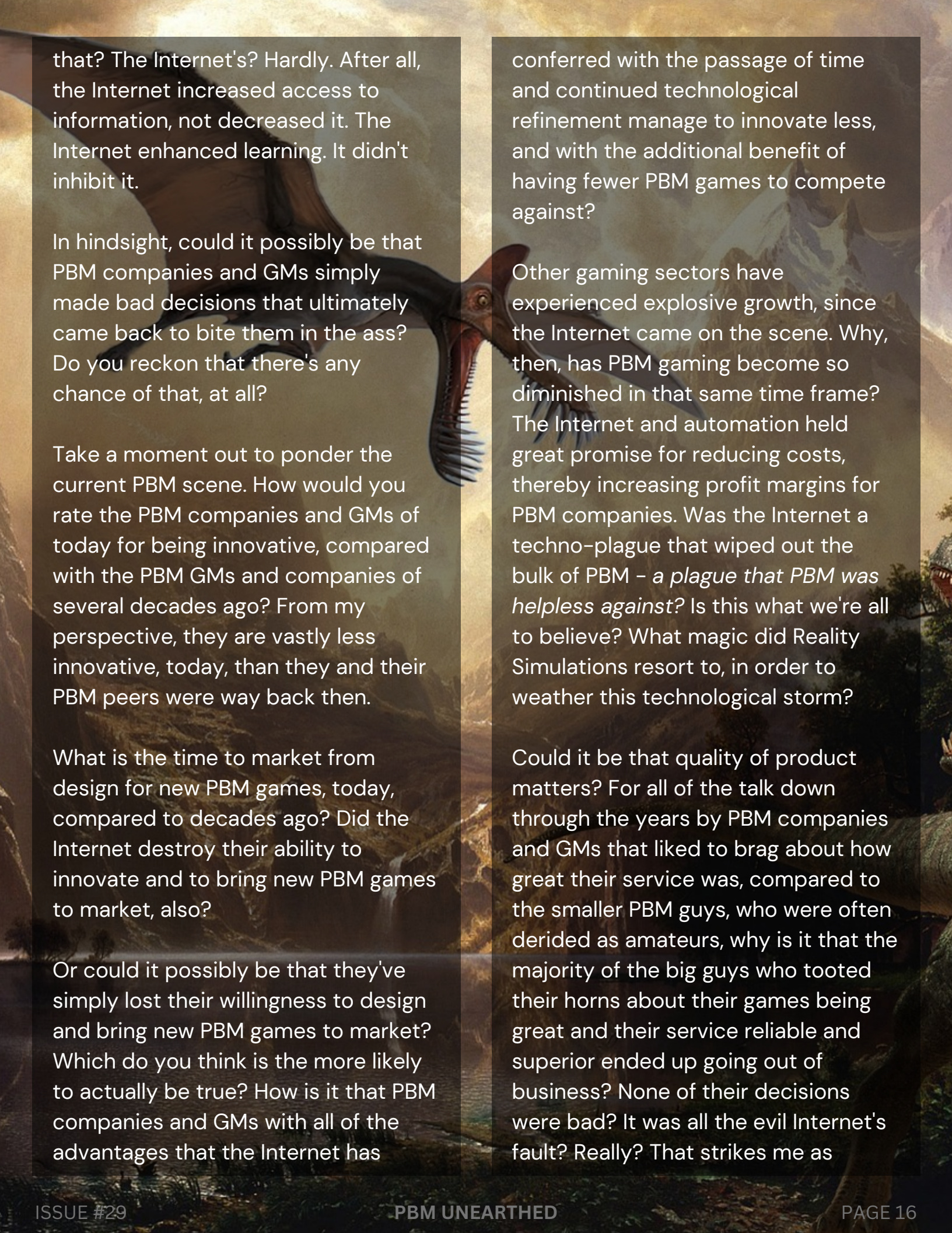
The arrival of the Internet was not the equivalent of existential threat. Instead, what it turned out to be was the arrival of a scapegoat in technological form.

Technology, it should be noted, always presents challenges. Heck, even the design, creation, and running of the original PBM games to arrive on the PBM scene presented challenges.

The Internet didn't come in and wipe everything else. In fact, the Internet didn't need to kill off so much as a single PBM game. After all, PBM companies and GMs were all too willing on their own to kill the vast majority of them off, all by themselves.

What choices did the Internet make for PBM companies and GMs? Not a single, solitary one. The Internet didn't force any PBM company or GM out of business. Rather, their own decisions did.

If PBM companies and GMs were simply ignorant of how make the Internet work for them, whose fault is



that? The Internet's? Hardly. After all, the Internet increased access to information, not decreased it. The Internet enhanced learning. It didn't inhibit it.

In hindsight, could it possibly be that PBM companies and GMs simply made bad decisions that ultimately came back to bite them in the ass? Do you reckon that there's any chance of that, at all?

Take a moment out to ponder the current PBM scene. How would you rate the PBM companies and GMs of today for being innovative, compared with the PBM GMs and companies of several decades ago? From my perspective, they are vastly less innovative, today, than they and their PBM peers were way back then.

What is the time to market from design for new PBM games, today, compared to decades ago? Did the Internet destroy their ability to innovate and to bring new PBM games to market, also?

Or could it possibly be that they've simply lost their willingness to design and bring new PBM games to market? Which do you think is the more likely to actually be true? How is it that PBM companies and GMs with all of the advantages that the Internet has

conferred with the passage of time and continued technological refinement manage to innovate less, and with the additional benefit of having fewer PBM games to compete against?

Other gaming sectors have experienced explosive growth, since the Internet came on the scene. Why, then, has PBM gaming become so diminished in that same time frame? The Internet and automation held great promise for reducing costs, thereby increasing profit margins for PBM companies. Was the Internet a techno-plague that wiped out the bulk of PBM – *a plague that PBM was helpless against*? Is this what we're all to believe? What magic did Reality Simulations resort to, in order to weather this technological storm?

Could it be that quality of product matters? For all of the talk down through the years by PBM companies and GMs that liked to brag about how great their service was, compared to the smaller PBM guys, who were often derided as amateurs, why is it that the majority of the big guys who tooted their horns about their games being great and their service reliable and superior ended up going out of business? None of their decisions were bad? It was all the evil Internet's fault? Really? That strikes me as



laughable.

Was it the arrival of the Internet that doomed play by mail gaming? Or could it be that other things, even a variety of different things, might actually have a substantial amount of bearing on how things turned out for the PBM industry and hobby?

The more that I look at things and ponder possibilities and likelihoods, the less I am persuaded that the Internet killed PBM. That said, it's way quicker and easier to just point fingers at the Internet, and to blame it for the downfall of PBM – *lock, stock, and barrel!*

On the one hand, direct competition from other PBM companies, PBM GMs, and PBM games has greatly diminished with the passage of time, even as, on the other hand, competition from other sectors of the entertainment industry can be said to have increased, both directly and indirectly. Video games, computer games, streaming video, social media, Tik Tok – these Johnny-come-latelies of the entertainment industry have ended up competing with PBM gaming not just in an entertainment sense, but in a time-allocation and time-consumption sense, as well. So, what is PBM gaming to do, in the face of these juggernauts

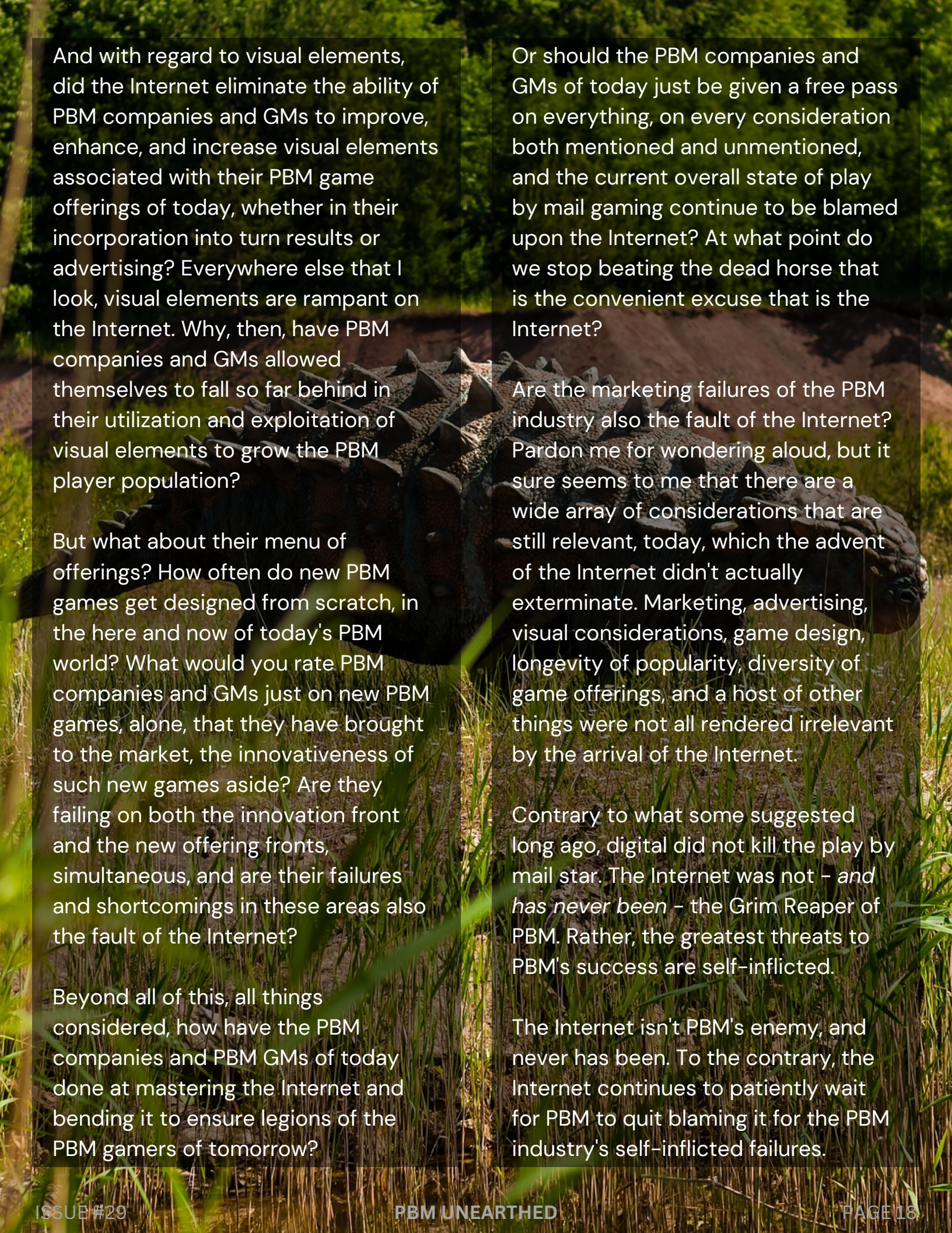
of recent vintage?

Well, tell me this, did the Internet eliminate or diminish opportunities and avenues for advertising by PBM companies and GMs? Nope, not at all. Yet, you tell me – *what are their great and bold and daring and imaginative advertising undertakings and campaigns, here in the current PBM era?*

If you were going to grade PBM companies and GMs for their commitment to advertising, as a mechanism to grow PBM, what kind of a grade would you give them?

In the old days, PBM advertisements appeared in a wide ranging of gaming and computer magazines. How far is the reach, magazine-wise, of PBM advertisements, currently? Where all do you encounter PBM advertisements at? It's not as though advertisement opportunities no longer exist. Or did the Internet also kill advertising opportunities for PBM companies and GMs? Tell me, what is it that you actually believe, when you sit and ponder such things?

Think about this, also, while you're at it. Did the Internet also kill the ability of PBM GMs and companies to engage with the gaming public at large? *That mean 'ol Internet!*



And with regard to visual elements, did the Internet eliminate the ability of PBM companies and GMs to improve, enhance, and increase visual elements associated with their PBM game offerings of today, whether in their incorporation into turn results or advertising? Everywhere else that I look, visual elements are rampant on the Internet. Why, then, have PBM companies and GMs allowed themselves to fall so far behind in their utilization and exploitation of visual elements to grow the PBM player population?

But what about their menu of offerings? How often do new PBM games get designed from scratch, in the here and now of today's PBM world? What would you rate PBM companies and GMs just on new PBM games, alone, that they have brought to the market, the innovativeness of such new games aside? Are they failing on both the innovation front and the new offering fronts, simultaneous, and are their failures and shortcomings in these areas also the fault of the Internet?

Beyond all of this, all things considered, how have the PBM companies and PBM GMs of today done at mastering the Internet and bending it to ensure legions of the PBM gamers of tomorrow?

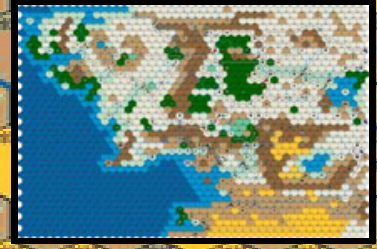
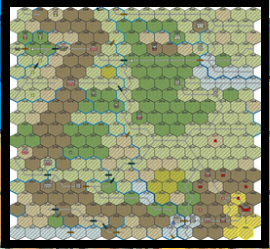
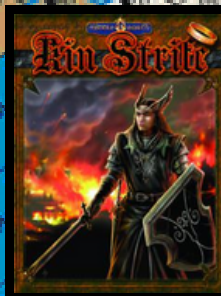
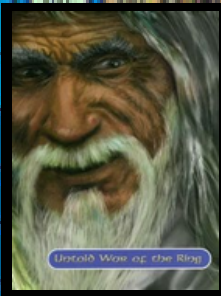
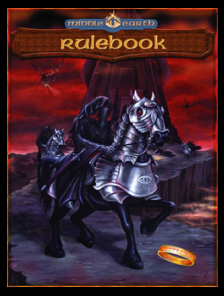
Or should the PBM companies and GMs of today just be given a free pass on everything, on every consideration both mentioned and unmentioned, and the current overall state of play by mail gaming continue to be blamed upon the Internet? At what point do we stop beating the dead horse that is the convenient excuse that is the Internet?

Are the marketing failures of the PBM industry also the fault of the Internet? Pardon me for wondering aloud, but it sure seems to me that there are a wide array of considerations that are still relevant, today, which the advent of the Internet didn't actually exterminate. Marketing, advertising, visual considerations, game design, longevity of popularity, diversity of game offerings, and a host of other things were not all rendered irrelevant by the arrival of the Internet.

Contrary to what some suggested long ago, digital did not kill the play by mail star. The Internet was not – *and has never been* – the Grim Reaper of PBM. Rather, the greatest threats to PBM's success are self-inflicted.

The Internet isn't PBM's enemy, and never has been. To the contrary, the Internet continues to patiently wait for PBM to quit blaming it for the PBM industry's self-inflicted failures.

# MIDDLE EARTH



# What are 3 things that YOU like about PBM?

## Richard Lockwood

1. Last Sunday, I went for a beer and lunch with a chap I'd not seen for over 20 years, who I got to know through PBM, and in whose garage I fell asleep. And it was though we'd not seen each other since a week ago.
2. I met my (now ex) wife at a murder/mystery party, hosted by the GM of my favourite ever SCHMRPG. And it's the most bonkers house in the country.
3. Explaining Interactive Fiction to amateur writers, and watching their faces fall into their jowls.

## Alex Bardy

1. Seeing an envelope and knowing it was my latest turn result - I'd normally grab it and take it to school with me, but occasionally would leave it as a special treat for when I came home... *The excitement and anticipation was amazing, tbh.*
2. Actually planning and writing my orders and making sure I've got as many avenues covered as possible, was also quite fun.
3. Making sure my orders were physically in the postbox was always a job I had to do myself - *I'd never entrust anyone else with the task!*

## Jeff Perkins

1. Time to think. And rethink. Rather than the instant responses required in most computer games, you can weigh up pros and cons of an action for a week or more, even if something needs to be dealt with immediately.
2. Time to build relationships and negotiate. You are going to be spending longer with other players in a PBM than in most games. That gives longer time to develop deeper relationships, and do more than a simple, temporary agreement on the hoof.
3. Shared specific interests. The nature and time frames for PBM means you have access to a global population to find the 12, 120 or 1200 with a shared interest, rather than getting together with a local games group and having to play something 4-8 people agree on - so you always end up with AD&D or Risk. And they don't all need to be able to get together on Saturday evening, or the campaign falls apart when one or two of them move away.

## Wayne "The Consortium" Smith

1. The receipt of turns via mail.
2. The anticipation of same.
3. The afar competition.

## Richard Weatherhead

1. The anticipation of waiting for my turn results.
2. Competing against equally/better/lesser crafty buggers and seeing whose strategy/tactics/diplomacy works the best.
3. But still being able to disassociate one game from another (generally), and get some knowledge of people's lives outside of PBeM.

Oh for conventions now, when I am not as painfully shy, though I am not in the same country as where they would be. 😊

## Alexander Sahn

I like playing and games in general. When I started with PBM, there was no such thing like a pc, on which nowadays, you can play gorgeous games.

Imagination was the key, and for me, it is, today.

1. I like the story of the game I'm participating in.
2. I like the people I'm playing with, as they are usually REALLY clever! (That means, I have to be clever, too!)
3. I like the thrill of waiting for my turn. (I don't like the disappointment, when I blew it)



## Wayne Wayne

1. Time to think about my actions.
2. Reading the GM's reply.
3. The way you can get NPCs to assist you – much harder to do in a TTRPG (well, mostly, not always).

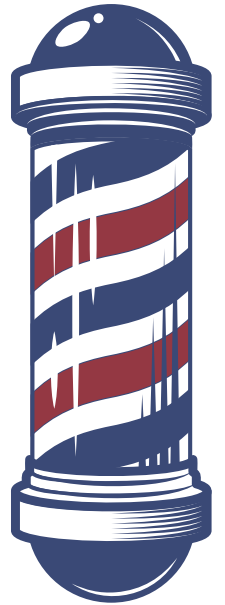
## Daniel Fisher

1. Always enjoyed the heck out of playing just about every PBM game I got involved with.
2. The anticipation of the turn results. Nothing like waiting seven to ten days for your results, especially if there were some special actions in them.
3. The people - met A LOT of nice folks during those years, a few not so nice, but they all come into play when you're doing PBM. I probably fell into both of those headings, when I was playing - depended upon the type of game I was in. Some games that have an end date, remember, there can ONLY be ONE winner (heh).

Extra: I have never tried one of the current games that allow daily or even faster playing with email submission and results. Once my time is ALL mine, I am thinking of trying one. I know I will be joining one or more of what's out there, most likely will give the current version of BSE a try. I did enjoy playing that one, back in the day. Will also give one or more of the wargame type a roll, again, as well. Maybe even Hyborian War. I did play that a bit, back in the day (hell, might even still have some of the old turn results around here, somewhere).

# PBM BARBERSHOP

"PBM links  
worth  
checking out!"



Rolling Thunder Forums



Rolling Thunder Games Website



SHAVES, HAIRCUTS, & PBM

# Facebook Groups

**Star Fleet Warlord**

133 Members

**Hyborian War**

118 Members

**Middle-earth PBM**

93 Members

**Madhouse UK - DungeonWorld**

84 Members

**PlayByMail.Net**

66 Members

**Forgotten Realms**

45 Members

**Duel2**

53 Members

# Facebook Pages

**Play By Mail Facebook Page**

369 Followers

**PBM Unearthed Facebook Page**

58 Members

# Discords

**MEPBM**

277 Members

**Atlantis New Origins**

211 Members

**Eressea**

163 Members

**PlayByMail.Net**

149 Members

**TribeNet - Tribe Talk**

125 Members

**KnightGuild**

69 Members

**Phoenix BSE (Unofficial)**

76 Members

**Miskatonic University Alumni**

75 Members

**Phoenix BSE**

51 Members

**SuperNova**

28 Members

**Sword and Crown**

23 Members

**Fire on the Suns**

22 Members

# From PBM Companies & GMs



EAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS Bf

## Middle-earth Games

The following games are currently accepting setups, and due to start soon.

### **Champions of Middle-earth**

Try a game of our 2 player module, now with rebalanced NPCs.

### **Game 954: 1650 Gunboat**

**3 nations per player.**

One champion character per nation.  
Northmen and Quiet Avenger have a 40 em.

6 rewards per nation.

Possibility of shared results - TBD.

4/8 positions available

### **Game 416: Fourth Age**

**Up to 2 nations per player**

17/25 nations available

### **Game 958: 1650**

Pre-aligned neutrals to ensure a balanced game.

**Up to 2 nations per player.**

One champion character per nation.

Northmen and Quiet Avenger have a 40 em.

12/24 nations available

### **Game 257: 2950**

**3 nations per player.**

One nation free as long as you have three nations in play!

5/8 positions available

### **Game 258: 2950 Gunboat**

**3 nations per player.**

One nation free as long as you have three nations in play!

4/8 positions available

### **Game 619: Kin-strife**

**Up to 2 nations per player.**

Pre-aligned or unaligned starting neutrals will be decided nearer game start.

9/14 nations available

### **Game 622: Kin-strife 3 nation Gunboat**

**3 nations per player.**

New combos: Loyalists: 1/3/6 and 2/4/21, vs. Usurpers 11/14/15 and 12/13/22.

Boosted setups - 20% extra points for nation 1, 10% extra points for nation 2.

One nation free as long as you have three nations in play!

2/4 positions available

**[Read the Middle-earth Newsletter](#)**

**[Subscribe to the Middle-earth Newsletter](#)**





## PBM QUOTE

"COULDN'T believe my eyes! But there it was in a recent *Space Gamer* -- Steve Jackson Himself stating that PBM is dead!"

**Dr. R. Terry Cale**

Flagship Editor (U.S. Edition)

Issue #8 - Autumn 1985

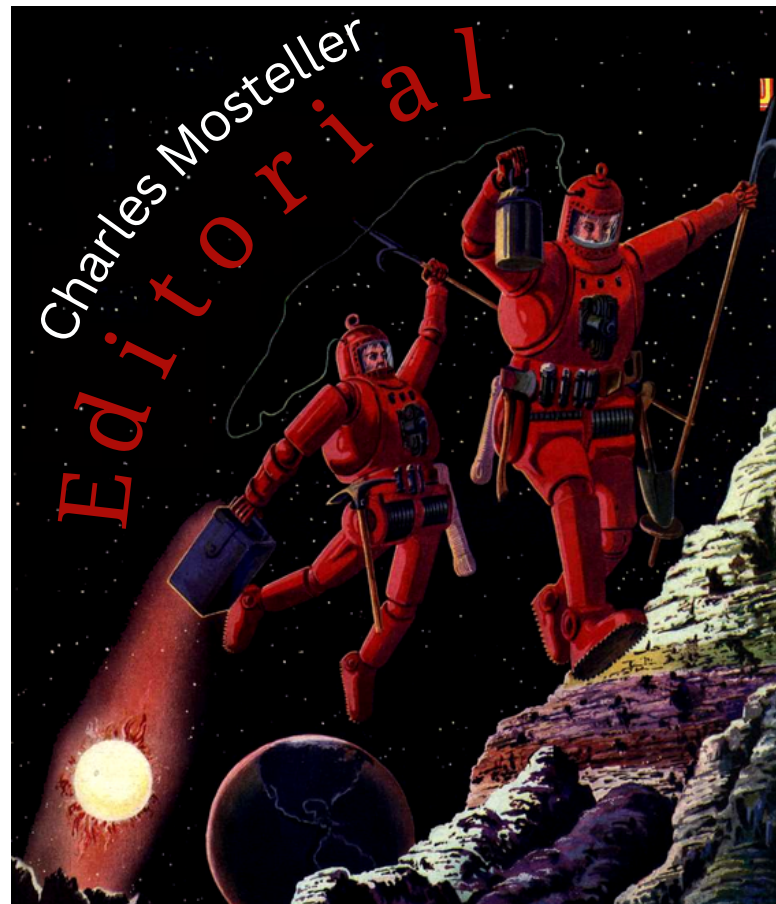
And here we are, almost forty years later, with Terry Cale's quote about Steve Jackson stating that PBM is dead finding its way into, of all things, a PBM newsletter. Terry couldn't believe it way back then, and I don't believe it, these several decades later.

Diminished? Yes. Dead? *Absolutely not.*

If you ever wonder why I routinely talk about some of the same things, over and over and over, where certain PBM related stuff is concerned, from my perspective, talking about PBM is a lot like fishing. Not every article, nor every issue, nor every Facebook posting, nor every PBM Discord posting will get a bite. There's still lots of PBM fish in the sea, but they're not always where I am, when I bait my verbal hooks. *One and you're done will never work.*

Also, some things, some issues, or certain problems that pertain to PBM are near and dear to my heart. That's just a fact. Like all of you, I have my opinions on all kinds of stuff that pertains to play by mail gaming. Whether you choose to voice your opinions on such matters or not, I choose to not just voice my opinions about PBM, but to repeatedly voice my opinions about PBM.

My role and my function is not to simply to say only bright and cheery and positive things about PBM. I've actually written and said quite a few positive things about PBM down through the years, and even in the pages of issues of PBM Unearthed. It's neither my place nor my desire to parrot what PBM companies and PBM GMs might prefer that I say. They have their own voices, and they are free to



speaking for themselves. I even provide space for them to do so, if they want it.

Reading, of course, requires an affirmative act. I don't go around forcing anyone to read anything that I write about PBM, the PBM industry, or the PBM hobby. In fact, if you just plain don't like PBM Unearthed, then don't read it. More times than not, though, there's usually stuff authored by others in the pages of most issues, so you can actually read parts of PBM Unearthed without ever having to read the stuff that I churn out for it. *It's so easy!*

A rather sizeable portion of stuff that I do or write that concerns PBM isn't actually for those who currently play or produce PBM games. A good bit of it is for PBM's posterity's sake.

On the Table of Contents page for this issue, there's another quote by Terry Cale from the year 1985, where he specifically identifies a "lack of visibility" as being the main reason why PBM'ing is consistently underestimated.

Historically and traditionally, advertising has been a channel whereby PBM companies and GMs can focus the public's attention on "only the good things" about a particular PBM company or PBM GM or PBM game. I even make a concerted effort to facilitate this by allowing PBM companies and GMs to advertise within the pages of PBM Unearthed for free. That way, even if they can't afford to advertise, they still can. And even if they don't know how to make an ad for their PBM game(s), I offer a free service to assist them in making new PBM ads possible.

Additionally, they can also write in. In other words, they can write articles singing their company's or their games' praises. They can speak glowing of what they bring to the PBM scene. There's no charge for them to do this. They simply have to be willing to actually put forth the effort to do so. That's what their own voice is for.

My own voice is for talking about things pertaining to PBM gaming and the PBM scene that I want to talk about. I allow for others to write in, as well, whether with just a brief comment or a question, or articles or series of articles. What I do not extend to anyone in the PBM realm is the equivalent of a heckler's veto.

If you don't like something that I write, you're quite free to write in and take issue with it. You are free to criticize what I've written. And if you want to criticize me, then you can do that, also. Again, no charge for the privilege of doing so.

If I'm wrong about a particular thing about PBM that I say, then write in and correct me. You can be tactful, or you can be blunt. The world isn't going to end, either way. It might even make you feel good to write in and get a few things off your chest. After all, I get things off my chest, at times, also. The last time that I checked, the world hasn't ended on any of the occasions where such transpired.

Feel free to disagree. Share your thoughts and your

opinions about anything and everything in the PBM realm with others. Some might even find what you think and say to be interesting. Heck, it might even spark new thoughts in them about PBM stuff. There are far worse things in life than either conversations or disagreements. In layman's terms, we don't all have to agree on everything. It's quite all right to disagree.

PBM GMs have a long and colorful history of criticizing PBM players, I know, because down through the years, I've read a number of such criticisms by PBM GMs about PBM players. More than one PBM magazine has played host to such criticisms, down through the last several decades, not to mention criticisms of PBM players voiced in other fora and mediums of communication. My first-hand experience has been that PBM GMs have often said whatever they wanted to say, pretty much however they wanted to say it.

Accordingly, PBM players and PBM editors are equally free to speak out on PBM stuff to at least an equal degree as PBM GMs are. Me? There aren't any PBM GMs out there that I hate. That I, at times, criticize them, either individually or as a group, should not be mistaken for me hating, nor even disliking, them, necessarily.

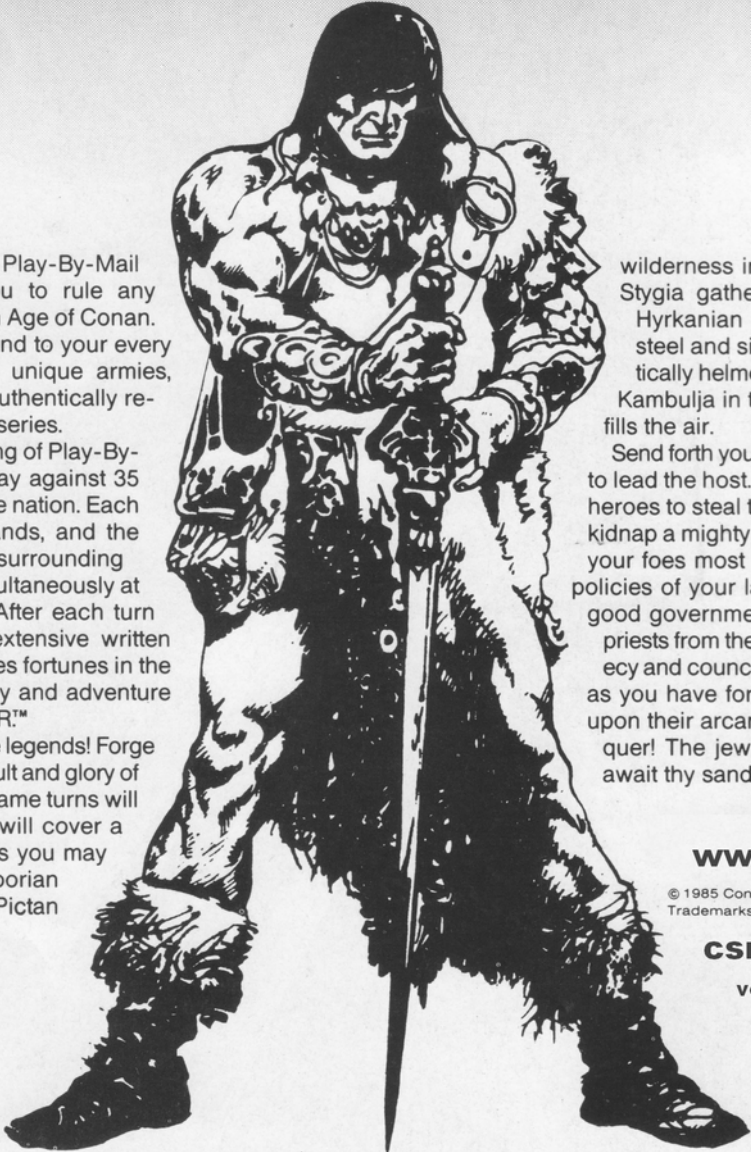
Currently, I publish an imperfect excuse for a PBM newsletter. In the almost four decades that I have been involved with play by mail gaming, I've yet to meet any PBM GMs who are perfect. Not a single, solitary one of them, as best as I can remember. It appears that we all live in an imperfect world.

I have no vested interest in discussion about PBM being sterilized of emotion. Human beings are, after all, an emotional species. We are opinionated creatures. We live in an oft-disputatious society. Public discussion and public debate on issues, even PBM issues, is a maelstrom. It goes hand in hand with a free society and liberty-loving individuals. *Until next issue, happy gaming, happy reading, and have a happy, happy day!*

PLAY

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wilderness in the west, to slumbering Stygia gathering her wizards, to the Hyrkanian kingdoms with riders in steel and silk and gold, to the fantastically helmed armies of the Khitai and Kambulja in the east, the cry of empire fills the air.

Send forth your tested lords and generals to lead the host. Send forth your spys and heroes to steal the treasures of the world, kidnap a mighty noble, or even assassinate your foes most gifted wizard! Decree the policies of your land, giving your subjects good government or bad. Call forth your priests from their temples to speak prophecy and council. Command such wizards as you have for the tide of war may turn upon their arcane magics. Rule and conquer! The jeweled thrones of the earth await thy sandaled tread.

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