

PBM ZOMBIES



ISSUE

2



PBM ZOMBIES

Because Play-By-Mail gaming refuses to die!

ISSUE #2

November 1st, 2025 Issue

COPYRIGHT © 2025 PLAYBYMAIL.NET

Editor: Charles Mosteller

Published by: PlayByMail.Net



This year,
they wanted the
good stuff,
not that
cheap candy.

IN THIS ISSUE. . .

DEADitorial

- 4** *PBM Zombies welcomes you to Issue #2!*
Charles Mosteller

PBM Personalities Speak

- 10** *Claim your spot in the PBM horde, today!*
Assorted PBMs Weighing In About PBM

Episode 1 - Combat Conditional: A Turn Based Gaming Podcast

- 16** *A Transcript of David Oliver Kling
interviewing Raven Zachary*
David Oliver Kling & Raven Zachary

Galac-Tac Meets The Guillotine

- 34** *In pursuit of a better understanding about criticism's
role in the PBM sphere.*
Charles Mosteller

Rulebook Reductio

- 46** *Shrinkage Is Not Always A Loss*
Charles Mosteller

Hyborian War

- 52** *A Play-By-Mail Game With A Wealth Of Choices*
Charles Mosteller

Send Submissions To: playbymail.net@gmail.com

DEADitorial



PBM Zombies welcomes you to Issue #2!

Only a mere moment in time technically separates Halloween from November 1st, and it's a real shame that such a colorful night as Halloween only falls but one day of the year out of three hundred and sixty-five. So, pardon me for granting an extension of Halloween's theme for the entire November 2025 issue of PBM Chaos. *And by the way, a belated but very happy Halloween to each and every last one of you, our readers of PBM Zombies magazine!*



At the time that I type these words to you, Halloween 2025 is still a full twenty days away. I thought that I would try to get an early start on this issue, to include on the Deaditorial editorial, in a bid to put some flesh on its bones. There's really nothing to it, right now, and it's for the better, I think, that you can't actually see it in its current hollow and empty form. Compared to putting together an issue of PBM Chaos, though, the coming deadline for this issue of PBM Zombies seems a world away, right now. *It's kind of relaxing, actually.*

"Trick or Treat" is the message of the day on every single Halloween. It could just as easily be the message of play by mail gaming. Back in the day, during what has long been hyped as the "golden era of PBM gaming," if you decided to try one of the hundreds of new PBM games that suddenly appeared on the PBM market, would you end up with a PBM trick or a PBM treat?

If a fly-by-night new PBM company ended evaporating and all of a sudden ceasing to exist, what a dastardly trick that must have been, huh, to those affected by such? But if you lucked out and ended up trying a PBM game that yielded a memorable game playing experience and solid customer service to boot, what a genuine treat that would have been, huh?

In today's PBM gaming market, what are the tricks and what are the treats that remain for one and all? Having less PBM games to choose from strikes me as more trick than treat. Even still, there seems to still be a few treats scattered to and fro, for the discerning PBM eye that's willing to look around and shop for an entertaining gaming experience in PBM format.

PBM games never received nor enjoyed any immunity from the inexorable march of technology, which is why, today, PBM gaming takes a variety of different forms, and is no longer confined to the narrow reaches of the postal service and physical mailboxes.

Now, you may like this new PBM reality, or you may hate it, but much like King Canute commanding the tide to stop, neither you nor I nor all of us, combined, have the power to halt technology or

progress.

Our nostalgia and fond memories of play by mail games experienced across the span of many yesteryears, as great and as pleasant and as endearing as they may have been, simply lack power to stop the march of time and all that comes with it. Change comes, whether we like it or not, and whether we're ready for it or not. This is one of the most fundamental of all life lessons that we are destined to learn and relearn - *over and over and over, again and again and again, it would seem.*

A strong and colorable argument exists that we never tend to learn the most obvious lessons - *whether in life, in general, or in PBM, specifically.*

When people quit playing commercial PBM games, they tend to go out of business. When PBM companies and PBM GMs stray too far from the core tenets of customer service, then PBM players

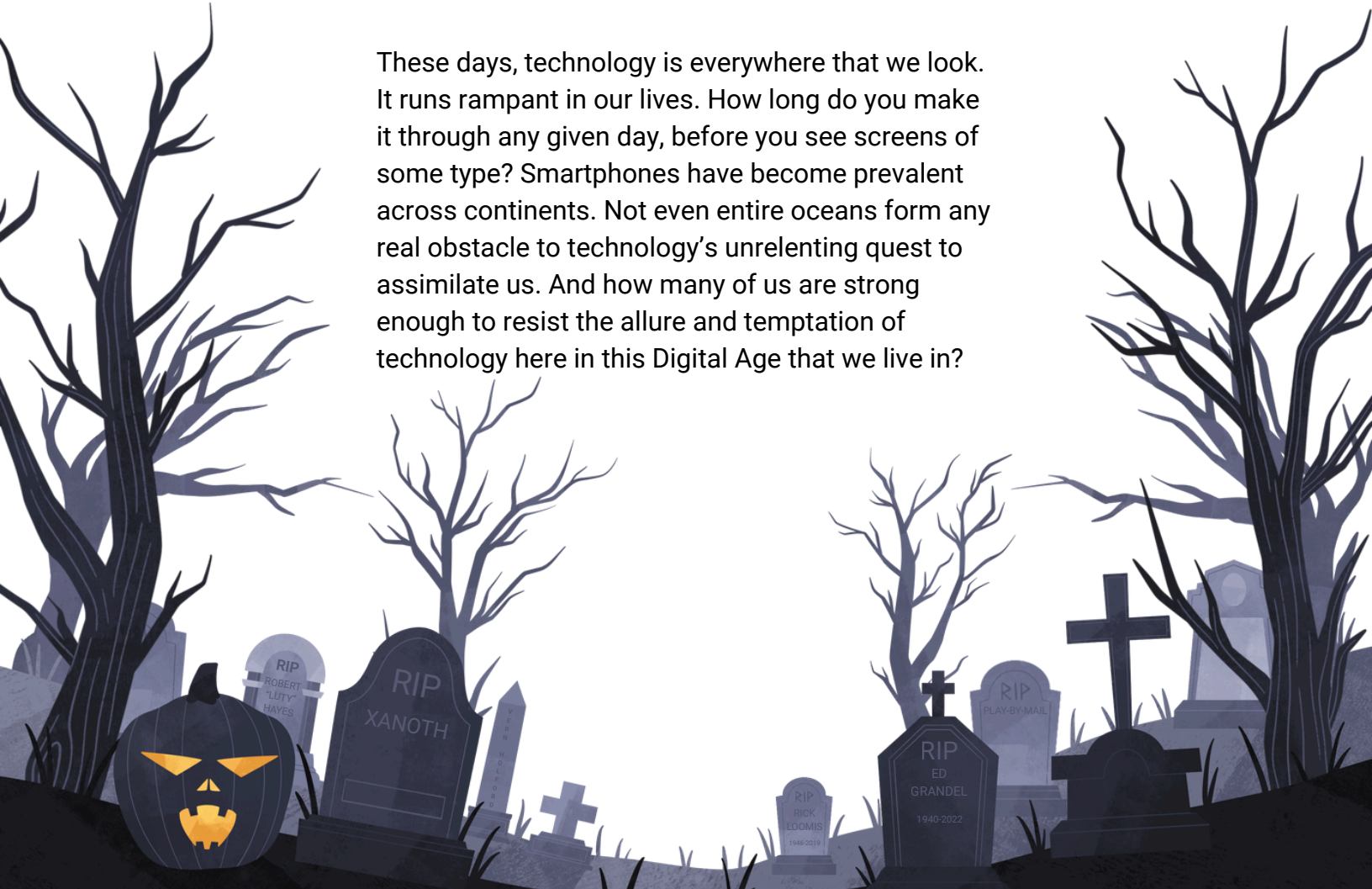
tend to become more motivated to seek entertainment elsewhere, whether in gaming form or non-gaming form.

If you play any PBM game currently, or if you have ever played a PBM game at any point in the past, what were the greatest treats that you feel that PBM bestowed upon you?

And while we're at it, let's go ahead and also ask what you think were the worst tricks that PBM visited upon you? Life isn't just and only about everything being good, after all, and neither is PBM gaming - *for better or for worse!*

For me, personally, Hyborian War was my favorite PBM treat. It was always a very tasty experience for me. Indeed, it is what, as much as anything else in play by mail gaming, that has kept me anchored to PBM as a continuing interest over a huge span of my lifetime.

These days, technology is everywhere that we look. It runs rampant in our lives. How long do you make it through any given day, before you see screens of some type? Smartphones have become prevalent across continents. Not even entire oceans form any real obstacle to technology's unrelenting quest to assimilate us. And how many of us are strong enough to resist the allure and temptation of technology here in this Digital Age that we live in?





Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo, Inc. fame preceded my entry into PBM gaming by a decade and a half or more. Like him, many other great luminaries of play by mail gaming have departed the PBM scene, though legacies and memories cement their respective places in PBM history.

PBM gaming has changed down through the years, though in some ways, it still remains largely the same. But us? We have changed, too, right along with PBM.

PBM Zombies magazine doesn't represent PBM being dead or dying so much as it represents PBM's pigheaded refusal to die. In the face of both adversity and unending challenges, play by mail gaming remains as stubborn as a mule.

Play by mail gaming was - *and remains* - conscious of our time, and of the demands on our time. These days, PBM gets kicked to the curb a lot.

It gets deprioritized. We shun it. It's like a relative that we know is kin to us, but we often act like it's a complete stranger. PBM was there for many of us, when we needed it the most in our lives. But now? Now, we haven't the time for it, anymore. Even worse, we refuse to make time for it.

We make excuses. We have "better" things to do. Our tastes have changed, and we dismiss PBM summarily out of hand. PBM games remain as fun as they ever did when they were in the limelight of their golden era, yet so many were in such a rush to put PBM out to pasture. Out of sight and out of mind in the nursing home of our gaming memories.

What a bunch of gaming bastards that we've become!

Let's not think about it, much less talk about it. Hey, it's not our fault that PBM got old, now is it? Maybe it wasn't PBM that grew old, though. Maybe it was us.

These days, many of us have become "too good for PBM." Play by mail gaming - *what an archaic concept, eh?* It's us that feel the aches and pains of growing older, though - *not PBM*.

We seem to have forgotten our gaming roots. We pretend to be "one of the kids" of today's era. Yet, we know that to be a load of crap.

PBM isn't dead, even if we've collectively, perhaps, forgotten how to have fun, PBM-style. If only PBM's golden era could have been extended by overreliance upon our worthless pile of excuses.



Simultaneously, we have one foot in the grave of play by mail gaming, and the other foot out of it. We straddle the fence between PBM being dead, and us being prone to remember it when it was full of life.

Why is it that PBM magazines are beloved more after they're dead than when they're still alive? We mourn their loss, after they're gone and have given up the ghost of continued publication, yet submit something to them to publish? *Talk about a bridge too far!*

I want to see some new PBM games. I also want to see some new spins and variations on old PBM games. Who wants to eat the same old shit everyday? And who wants to wait until they actually die, before the PBM industry finds their former penchant for innovation?

Perhaps PBM isn't dead, only lifeless. Maybe a lot of people mistake the the two as being the exact, same thing.

They aren't.

One is actually dead. The other only takes on the appearance of being dead.

Yet, play by mail gaming, these days, is often talked about in hushed tones, if at all. Many still hold it in reverence, as a form of gaming entertainment. Old tried-and-true, the staunch reliable of gaming's yesteryear.

But today? I just don't have time. We just don't have time. Nobody's got any time. *Have you ever heard a bigger load of horseshit in your entire life?*

Amazingly, though, there's still twenty-four hours in every single day. Yet, we have no time. We've just become so damned important. Just look at how important we all are, now. *Give me a break!*

I'm talking to the wind, people. Are there any people out there reading this? Or just a bunch of crickets? Because I hear crickets.

How excited should PBM gamers be, though? Is there a steady stream of PBM news from PBM companies and PBM GMs flowing non-stop? Do we need to hire Sherlock Holmes to track down this never-ending stream of fresh PBM news and PBM information?

What's that, you ask?

Oh, that's my job? It's *my* job to track down everything that's PBM-related, and hand-deliver it to one and all on a silver platter? I don't recall ever telling anyone that *that* was my job.

PBM isn't dead. It's just gotten turned on its head. In the old days, there was lots of PBM noise all over the place. These days, not nearly as much. Silence is much more in-vogue on the PBM scene, these days. If we're not careful, then others may actually learn that PBM is still around. *So, ssshhh!*

Be vewy, vewy quiet. Ever notice how, these days, PBM gaming is kind of like an Elmer Fudd cartoon? Or have we outgrown cartoons, too? These days, anime is what many of us prefer. They still look like cartoons to me. *Or is that politically incorrect?*

Maybe playing PBM games is politically incorrect these days, also.

For all of my words, people still play PBM games - *even in this day and age*. I count that a good thing. Hope springs eternal from it, also. At least, for me it does. *I hope that you enjoyed your Halloween!*

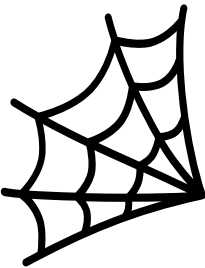
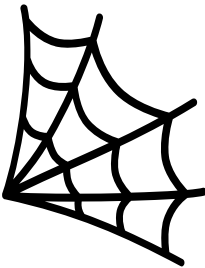




Hey, mummy! Don't be a dummy.

Send us something to include
for Issue #3 of PBM Zombies!

Give yourself a treat this Halloween season

 **HAPPY** 
HALLOWEEN

by signing up for a PBM game!



PBM Personalities Speak

PBM Personality Column #1

Hammer Hype

If you live long enough, there will come at least one time in your life, if not several numerous times, when something in your daily routine and personal schedule has got to give.

As the old saying goes: *Fish or Cut Bait!*

There are times to Hang On.

There are times to Let Go.

Such a time in my gaming schedule impacted me at the end of September.

I discovered that in two games of Alamaze, I had missed two deadlines; thus, negatively impacting my Two Kingdoms so severely, that I was unable to remain remotely competitive!

Therefore, I made the choice to delete both kingdoms.

My juggling of several other games, plus consistently writing for PBM Chaos and PBM Zombies, had taken its toll on my ability to submit orders on a timely basis for my 72-Hour Alamaze games.

Perhaps I will return to playing Alamaze sometime in 2026, but I am in no hurry to do so!

You can explore www.alamaze.net to decide for yourself if this is a PBeM game for you.

#####

I also recently dissolved my participation in an ROK Organized Game of Hyborian War King of

Games game where I was partnered with another **Road of Kings** (ROK) Player. I was playing two kingdoms and he was playing one! I mentioned to him via a direct message or personal message at the ROK that I was losing interest in playing Hyborian War. It was becoming more of a chore than it was fun.

He volunteered to take over my two kingdoms, so we made the necessary arrangements with the KOG Game Moderator and Sandy at Reality Simulations.

Maybe one day, I will play another kingdom in a Hyborian War game, but my interest in playing Hyborian War has faded away to interest in playing other PBM-type games that are currently more entertaining than Hyborian War is for me at the present time.

#####

Last PBM Zombies Issue #1, while I was reading the podcast transcript by Wayne Davis, my mind began to wander down my own "Memory Lane" to a segment of time where I used to play "Play-By-Post" games at the Red Dragon Inn website. These games entailed posting several paragraphs devoted to the thoughts and actions of our characters, rather than just a one-line sentence.

The game master would also write several paragraphs, including the essence of what we wrote for our characters, to advance the game and resolve actions or introduce new scenarios that our characters would be forced to respond to with great details of our own prose, and sometimes poetry or song.

The creation of our characters usually included in-depth back-stories, so the time and energy

devoted to creating our character(s) for each Game(s) weighed heavily upon us whenever our character(s) were faced with the possibility of dying.

It was always wise to have a cleric (or two) in the adventuring party! It was important to have a cleric that could minister healing to a wounded or dying character! After all, many of us players had invested hours in creating characters and back-stories.

Therefore, to have a character or characters die was extremely devastating!

I had the unfortunate experience, once or twice, of my character dying and not returning to the game.

Once was more than enough of an experience for me, but it added a depth of realism to the game.

#####

Which brings me to my present-day-experience of playing Gravenheim!

I had a mercenary character named Flynn that ended up dying.

You can read more about the death of Flynn in PBM Chaos Issue #51, if you are interested in the details.

I had only spent a fraction of the time developing Flynn, as compared to several Characters that I had created at the Red Dragon Inn in years-gone-by.

However, the loss of Flynn, as a current play-tester in the Gravenheim game of gothic horror, was probably the most devastating loss of a "Paper Character" that I have ever experienced over the course of my PBM-playing lifetime!

In spite of Flynn dying, I thoroughly enjoyed his story-arc, which you can read about in PBM Chaos Issues 49 and 51, if you so choose to do so!

Flynn was well worth the time I spent creating him and submitting his actions to the Gravenheim game.

There are both rewards and consequences for your character's daily actions.

I have found this to be very entertaining.

Check out game details at www.gravenheim.com for further information to see if this is a game that you would possibly find to be an entertaining experience.

#####

Galac-Tac Galaxy #228 still has nine (9) openings for players!

Check out talisman-games.com for more details regarding this outer space war game.

#####

I have filled out a mere 3 orders for the Galac-Tac Galaxy #223 learning game.

However, I will probably delete those 3 orders in favor of a new approach for Turn Five!

Good thing that I still have 8 days to submit orders, as of this writing.

#####

Yesterday, I sent an Email to galvidiere@gmail.com to learn a bit more about a new play-by-mail game titled Galvidiere that was advertised in PBM Chaos Issue #51, choosing to play the first five installments via email, mainly

because I have run out of stamps, and it may be a couple of weeks before I am able to purchase more postage stamps.

As advertised: ***Become the main character of your very own zombie(ish) horror story!***

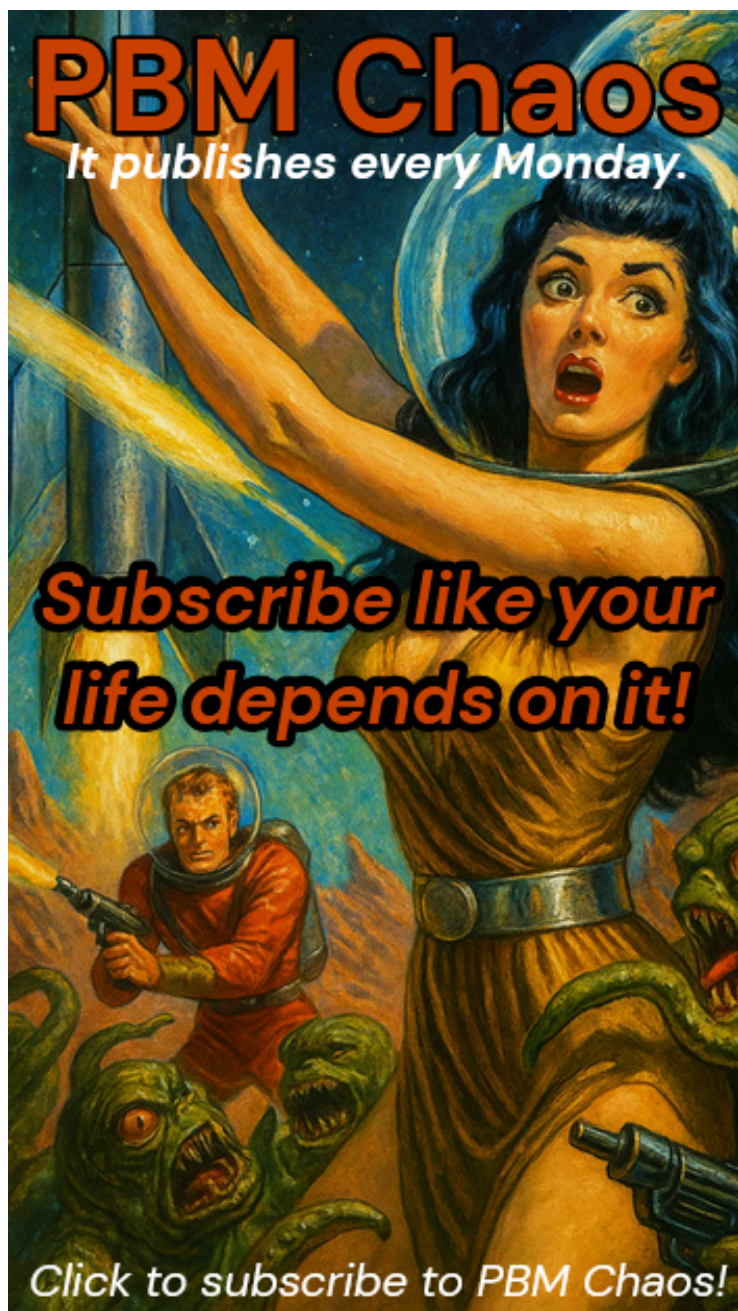
Travel through the United States, while fighting your way through zombie-like skeleton creatures in search of a safe haven called Galvidiere – all from the comfort of your home using the power of the United States Postal Service!

#####

Hungry and thirsty for more play-by-mail information?

Send an email to playbymail.net@gmail.com to subscribe for free to PBM Chaos, which currently publishes every Monday, in a labor-of-love to feed your PBM imagination!

Daryl P. Holloman aka Hammer



Monster Island Day 2025

Happy Halloween and Happy Monster Island Day! This special gaming occasion was the brainchild of some downtime and my first efforts at using AI, specifically ChatGPT. I envisioned it during the summer as a month-long Monster Island Month event, and AI provided some fun ideas for each day in October. Then I realized I wouldn't keep up with such an ambitious pace and culled it down to Monster Island Week. In early September, I was struck by the PBM Apathy Stick™, which caused a hiccup in the publication of The Monster Island Monitor. After two short weeks, it rose like the phoenix of old, but with it came the realization that Monster Island Day was a much more manageable ambition.

And here we are! I've published **The Monitor's Special Monster Island Day 2025 Edition**. It's too early to say whether we'll see a return of this ultra-special event in 2026. Anything's possible in the wide, wide world of PBM gaming.



Adam Warlock



PBM Personality Column #3

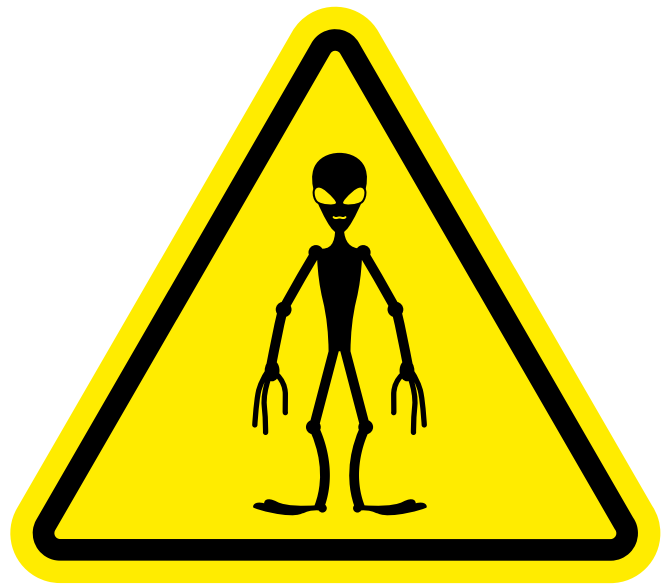
Reverse Grave Digging

On the topic of rulebooks, maybe this is one area where technology has not necessarily helped PBMs. In Games Mastership, the authors devote a section to rulebook design and considerations. "Printing can be extremely expensive" they point out, and as such, a PBM GM needs to choose carefully what to include. "Don't try to save money by printing a large quantity...you may need to revise." The financial limitations imposed by printed rulebooks forced GMs to (at least try to) keep their rules lean, mean, and clear. But in an age of endless PDF and Word documents, you can stuff in as much as you want, whenever you want. AI-inflated rules only seem to be compounding the problem, because now you don't even have to spend the time writing it, yourself. Ironically, the video game industry seems to be moving in the opposite direction: largely eliminating instruction manuals altogether in favor of in-game tutorials and intuitive play mechanics.

The Prospector

Grow the PBM Zombie Horde!

PBM Zombies, the magazine, could sure use your help growing the PBM Horde, and with making this a more interesting and anticipated PBM magazine for one and for all. ***Help us out by claiming a PBM Personality column in time for Issue #3!***



The New Play By Mail Discord

Play By Mail

Status updates for issues of PBM Chaos and PBM Zombies on Discord from here on out will get posted on the new PlayByMail Discord.

Join Us There!



*"One round trip ticket and one oneway ticket
to Grand Canyon."*

Episode 1 – Combat Conditional: A Turn Based Gaming Podcast

A Transcript of David Oliver Kling
interviewing Raven Zachary on June 27th, 2022.

David Oliver Kling & Raven Zachary

[You can also [listen](#) to the podcast!]

Welcome to Combat Conditional, a turn based gaming podcast. My name is David Oliver Kling, your host, and I've been playing these types of games since 1986. You might be asking yourself, what is turn based gaming? It is a type of gaming that has been called play by mail gaming. And as the genre evolved, as play by email gaming, the genre is ever changing and is now often referred to as turn based gaming.

Many games being offered are like board games with several different games providing role playing opportunities as well. It all depends on the game. In this podcast, I will be sharing news on the industry and interviews with both players and game producers and designers. This podcast is sponsored by Suspense and Decision magazine, which started publication on 11/30/2013 and is now being published by Talisman Consulting. Check it out.

There is a link in the show notes. Welcome to episode one of combat conditional, where I talk about turn based gaming, also known as play by mail gaming or play by email gaming. In this episode, I have the honor of welcoming Raven Zachary to the podcast. I've known Raven for

many years. We played in a play by mail game out time days back in the nineteen eighties, and he joins me to talk about play by mail gaming past, present, and future.

Let's get started. Thank you, Raven, for joining me. It's so good to talk to you again. I know I mentioned in the introduction that we first met back in the nineteen eighties playing out time days together. I thought what we would do first,



since this is the first episode of the podcast, which I've named Combat Conditional, Let's talk about what is turn based gaming?

What is play by mail gaming or play by email gaming? How would you define it? Yeah. Great question. So the origins of this gaming genre, it's called by different, terms.

You know, play by mail or play by post, play by email, turn based gaming. There's all these sorts of terms that are that are focused on the same genre of games. It has its origin in the nineteen seventies with postal gaming. Back before, it was organized by companies who were doing this and running game for players, imagine playing chess by mail. Let's say you had a friend who was deployed in the armed services and was overseas.

You could play a game of chess by essentially just mailing a letter to your friend and having those moves slowly go back and forth. Forth. I mean, chess is a turn based game. Right? Black and white go in alternating order, starting with, white.

And you can imagine sending those orders back and forth through the mail. In the later nineteen seventies, it was really turned into a an industry hobby. You had companies starting in the late seventies who were running these games professionally. Initially, hand moderated, no computers involved. People would sit down with papers and pencils and write things send in their orders via post in the mail, and the the game master would receive all of these orders from various players, process them, and send the result back.

This hobby has changed over the years. It started focused on postal mail because that was the best way to get printed information back and forth between the players and the

game masters. And then it shifted towards email, play by email games in the early to mid nineties as you saw the proliferation of the Internet. And then with the proliferation of the web later in the nineties and then into the aughts, of the next century, you saw play by browser or play by web based games where you could submit your orders through a web form. They will be processed by a computer, and then you would generally get those sent back to you via email.

So there's there's really, I think, three things that play by mail game or turn based games do very well. It's paste games, large games, and open ended games. Not all play by mail games do all three of them. There are some play by mail games that are victory conditions based games which aren't open ended. They have a defined beginning and defined end with various victory conditions that you must fulfill to win.

But there are also some play by mail games that are open ended, which means you're in that game for as long as you want to play until you're eliminated or you choose to quit. And I think let's just talk briefly through these three things that I think play by mail does well, and in fact, they're better than any other genre of games. So the first one is a pace kind of a paced game. You know, in the modern world, you rarely have four to six hours of uninterrupted time. If you wanna sit down with a large group and play a role playing game campaign or you wanna play a large epic board game, it's really hard to find this time, especially in COVID where we've been generally less social than we have been over the last two and a half years.

You know, I can play a play by mail game in fifteen minute increments. I sit down at my computer. I do my planning. I do my processing. I may have the little fifteen minute chunks of time as a working adult, you know, as a parent,

as a spouse, as a as a worker, you know, it's easier for me to get fifteen minutes of time than it is to get four to six hours of uninterrupted time.

So the the paced part is key because I can adapt the hobby to my own schedule, which is, I think, a key aspect of why this has been successful for me, this kind of gaming in my life. The second one is large games. Most board games can only be two to six players, and I would think that most role playing game campaigns are three to six players, generally. You know, with play by mail games or turn based games, you can have dozens or or hundreds of players in the exact same game, which is a pretty exciting space to play in because you have all of this human element of coordination, diplomacy, packs working together, making alliances, doing trading, and these types of things. And the third the third aspect is is I think what is really key is the is the open endedness.

And, again, this does not apply to all Play by mail games, but it's the games I I find myself gravitating most towards, which is the sense of long term commitment and feeling immersed in the story over the course of many years. And not just sitting down for a two hour board game or a forty five minute board game, and then it's over. You know, when I when I play a long board game, I'm left with this feeling of this kind of immersive experience. You know, I have stories to tell. Even my best gaming experiences with with board games have been these long epic multi session experiences, whether that's, you know, sitting down over the course of a weekend and playing mega civilization, which is a big ten to twenty hour long epic civilization game.

You know, once I played a five year long epic game of empires and arms, a Avalon Hill

Napoleonic war game. We played that one Sunday every month for five years. Or even sitting down to play a six to eight hour long Twilight Imperium game. You know, these are great long experiences. But imagine playing a three hundred or a three thousand hour long game over the course of multiple years.

You have these incredible stories. You know, you're building this world with other people. And these are things I mean, you and I often will reminisce about some of these incredible experiences that we had in nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties playing five milligrams together because they're just they're so immersive. And, you know, it it saddens me a bit that this is a genre of gaming that has declined. And if you look at why I you know, there's, I think, a couple of reasons with this decline.

And then I would love to get your feedback since I've been speaking nonstop for the last few minutes. You know, peak PBM, the the peak of turn of this turn based gaming genre really was in the late eighties and nineteen nineties before the Internet was pervasive and video games took over. It's not just the fault of video games. You know, video games, I think, were part of it. They were part of the reason why the younger generation of gamers didn't move into play by mail games because video gaming was so accessible and you could play it in, again, short term increments.

Yeah. You know, it's a very kind of immediate response, you know, kind of a frenetic immediate payback. But it's also, I think, in the late nineties, there was this, genre of games called collectible card games, CCGs. And I think the the the growth of the CCG market, which which grew incredibly fast in the late nineties and then collapsed with the economic downturn in the early aughts. That that that I think combination of video games and

collectible card games were the reason why younger gamers didn't come into that hobby.

And so you kind of had a freeze on new players coming into this hobby, and the older generation has aged out, and it just hasn't been replaced. And add to that the fact that postal cost and term processing cost went way up. Cost of labor went up, cost of postage went up, and then the Internet eliminated a lot of the need to send letters because we had email. And so I think it was bad timing. COVID should have seen the resurgence of PBMs.

We should have seen this great return to the PBM or turn based gaming genre because we were stuck at home for two years. But the game masters that are still operating games in this genre didn't really take the opportunity to market and promote this genre, unfortunately. And so we didn't see a resurgence that I was hoping for in the last two years. Yeah. I would agree.

We had an opportunity with COVID, and it wasn't taken. And that's, you know, very much unfortunate. Not much I can add to your definition of play by mail gaming and your, you know, your brief synopsis of the genre, which was excellent, by the way. I would add that I love video games, and I'm I was a World of Warcraft player for probably ten years before I got tired of paying \$15 a month. And you do the math.

That's, like, \$1,500, I think, I paid Yeah. Like World of Warcraft over ten years. But one thing about the massive the MMO genre is similar in a way to play by mails. It's open ended play by mails. But one of the problems is is the game company that makes the game controls the narrative of the game 100%.

All you're doing is inserting your character, your

tune into that and and playing the story that they have written. But with turn based gaming, with play by mail gaming, the players control the narrative in a way. I mean, the the game master creates the framework, but then the players flesh it out. And and that's the difference, I think. Yeah.

Especially in these open ended games where there's this notion of special action. Special action is a concept in Play by Mail games, that's in some games, not all, where you can essentially write a custom order that happens outside of the framework of the mechanics of the game. Think of it kind of like a role playing aspect of a game where you could take the game in entirely different direction if the game master wishes to allow you as a player to do that. Yeah. And I forgot so many memories of playing different play by mail games over the years where I can talk for for for a long time about the things that that we did outside of the turns, just on the phone.

I remember being, you know, 16, 17 years old, living at home in the eighties with a 100 phone bill because I was talking to people across the country between turns about what we were gonna do. And those memories are I cherish those memories. And and that was just a great experience. When I first met you, I was in the navy. I was stationed in Washington DC.

We were playing out time days together. I think my character was Al Capone and yours was Anton Mueller. And I still remember that. I still remember the conversations that we had. I remember being in my barracks room pacing back and forth on the phone because I had a, you know, I had a cord because it was a, you know, a landline.

We didn't have cell phones back then, and we were talking about what we were gonna be

doing in game. You know, those are great memories. And I think this genre of gaming fosters that. It's the reason why I love playing MMOs is not because I usually play with other people. I tend to play at weird hours of the night, so I'm oftentimes a solo player, but I like being a part of a community and seeing other people around doing their thing.

And and I think that's the draw for turn based gaming. You're not playing the game by yourself. You're playing a game with tens of other people and sometimes hundreds of other people. And and I think that's aspect of turn based gaming that's just pretty awesome, and I wish more people would learn about it. I completely agree.

There's about 70 play by mail games that are still being offered from 34 different game masters for companies. If people are interested in seeing that list, it's up on the Suspense and Decision blog. The best way to get to it is either just to Google for sense sorry. Suspense and decision, quite a mouthful. The Suspense and Decision website from Google.

Or else if you go to [bit.ly](http://bit.ly/gamesindex), bit.ly/gamesindex. That's bit.ly/gamesindex. You can get right to that index. And I try to keep that list up to date every few months of what play by mail or turn based games still exist and are being offered to players. Excellent.

I will put a link to that in the show notes. Let let's switch gears a little bit. We've talked already a little bit about the the past. In this episode, I wanna talk about past, present, and future. So do you have some words that you can add to what you've already shared about the past within play by mail gaming?

Yeah. So looking back at kind of the the peak of play by mail games, which again, as a reminder,

kind of late nineteen eighties to late late nineteen eighties to late nineteen nineties, that time period, you had multiple magazines dedicated to this hobby. You had multiple conferences. People were holding conferences just for play by mail gamers. I went to Gen Con, which is a, you know, large role playing game based and board gaming based conference back in 1987 as a 13 year old kid.

And there were dozens of play by mail game vendors who would run these games professionally at that conference. You know, there were ads in the back of Dragon Magazine, which was the magazine read by Dungeons and Dragons players. That's how I first found out about Play de la Games in 1983. As a 10 year old kid, I think by by the time I was 11, a year later, I was playing in multiple multiple games. You know, you pay a small turn fee somewhere between \$2 and and \$6, which although at the time, as a 10 or 11 year old kid, it was a lot of money.

But as you mentioned, we we both spent more money on longest phone bills at that time That's right. Talking to players than we did paying the game masters to run our games for us. I mean, it was a whole genre, a very popular genre of games. And these there were people who had companies with dozens of employees that would that would process turns. I mean, one of the one of the worst memories I have actually as a kid playing Play with Mill games was missing the turn deadline.

Now Recruiting...

Top gunners needed immediately to serve on all our latest and greatest battleships.



Design • Build • Conquer

Play Galac-Tac at www.talisman-games.com

This was actually not that uncommon. You'd send in your orders as a letter, and it would arrive at the the address of the game master, let's say, a day or two late, and you would miss the turn processing deadline. And so you would get back in the mail what was called a maintenance turn or an auto turn, which is basically your your position did nothing or almost nothing that turn. And that was a a horrible letter to get back in the mail because you missed the deadline because the mailman or the mail woman or whoever whatever it was just made that one or two days late, unfortunately. Yeah.

I hated those things. I I hated the maintenance turns. Yeah. So what can you say about if the renaissance in turn based gaming was the late eighties to the late nineties, What can be said about the current state of play by mail gaming today?

Yeah. A couple comments. Certainly a smaller player base, a smaller game base, you know, down to 70. There probably were hundreds of these games running in the eighties and nineties. You know, the the the size of the market is quite small. No one's really put their finger on the pulse of the size of this market because this is not data that's generally shared between the game masters.

But my guess is is that you're just talking about probably somewhere between 750 and 2,000 players, which seems incredibly small when you compare that to something like the size of the board gaming hobby or the size of the role playing gaming hobby. You know, most people have multiple board game stores in their city nearby. So it seems incredibly small when I when I estimate 750 to to 2 players. But, you know, for 70 games, that would kinda make sense. Right?

When you, you know, you have in any game anywhere between, let's say, 2,200 players. There there's a couple play of middle games that have more than 200 players. But I would say that in most of those cases, those aren't 200 people in the same game. That could be a game like Middle Earth or Hyborian War, which is the victory conditions based game. And those games have anywhere between, let's say, ten and forty players.

But some of the larger games, Supernova, which are open ended games, you know, those have hundreds of players. Because of the the prison population, PBMs actually have quite a strong following in the prison system because it is a form of gaming that actually still exists and because of the lack of Internet access and video game access in prisons, of course. Play of Mille gaming has a very strong following in prisons. In fact, in one prison, USP Tucson, a a federal facility in Tucson, Arizona, there are over 50 play by mail gamers just in one prison. Oh, wow.

It's quite popular. And and a lot of those players are playing a game called Super Nova, which is a a kind of a four x open ended space exploration game. But there are others too. There's about 10, I think, Play by Mail games that still offer postal service. And so the prisoners, this is one way that they can have entertainment is play Play by Mail games from prison.

Yeah. That's fascinating. That's probably a market that's not being tapped very well by the companies that are out there now. Not very well. I mean, I do I did create a flyer, for the prisoner players to pass around that has a list of all of the games that offer postal service.

And I'm told that's being photocopied and and traded around in the prison system because a

lot of the prisoners only knew about one game. They knew about the game that a friend of theirs maybe turned them on to, but I've been trying to educate prison population a little bit more about the breadth and depth of the hobby. I wonder if there's a way I mean, do the do prisoners have access to podcasts? It depends on the prison. It depends on the crime.

So there is a and also depends on whether you're in a state or federal facility. So if you're in a state facility, you're beholden to whatever the state laws are related to the the laws of that state related to access to the Internet. I would say in most cases, most prisoners have access to an incredibly basic email service. In the federal prison system, where I think play by mail games are more popular, there is a system called CoreLinks. And CoreLinks is kind of a private email server.

I can't directly email a prisoner with an email address. But what I can do is log in to the CoreLinks site, and I can type in the prisoner ID and create a connection. And then from a web page, I can send emails. But I can't send them any attachments. So, you know, a lot of play by mail games that are offered via email today send the results in PDF in Adobe Acrobat format.

Those will not work. You'd have to send essentially a 4,000 character or less text email to a prisoner who could then respond to it. So even the Playbook mail games that offer service to prisoners, it's done by postal mail because of the issue around access from the prison to the the Internet or to attachment. Based on the crime, you actually may not be allowed to access email at all. This is true with both cybercrime prisoners as well as sex crimes prisoners.

A lot of them, the judge in the case or the prosecutor in the case will actually limit their access to to any sort of email access during their time in prison. Interesting. It does seem like an untapped market for those companies that are willing to continue to offer their games by mail to to market to those who are incarcerated? Because I imagine Agreed. Those who are incarcerated do have a small budget from which they can pay for their turns, or do they usually get their turns free?

How did that how does that work? It it would be paid because the cost of of processing and the postage of sending. In those cases, you know, some some inmates have access to work opportunities within a prison depending upon the prison. And in some cases, you know, they're given a stipend from family. They're given money from family members to play.

That that would be a, like I said, a great opportunity for companies to to start putting some investment into those prison systems to to get players. Are there any other comments that you have on the current state of affairs within play by mail gaming within turn based gaming? You have a much better pulse on it than I do. Yeah. I would say that that the community that exists surrounds the genre.

So when you think about the play by mail gaming community, it's it's a mix of nostalgia and kind of hardcore players. So, you know, a lot of us are on the playbymail.net Facebook group, and Charles Mosteller does a really great job at posting a lot of nostalgic references to old games, and people post about great memories they have. There's certainly a nostalgia community for a play by mail. Problem is you're not seeing a lot of players actively participate in multiple games. So back in the eighties and nineties, you would have play by mail gamers playing half a dozen or so different games at the same time.

So, there was a sense that there was a community of players, and people wanted to know what was going on in the community, new games, new opportunities, conferences, magazines in the genre. Now most players play a single game, and they tend to play that game because they have a nostalgic memory of that game and a time in their life probably that was less complicated when they were a teenager living at home without all of the modern day responsibilities that they have today. You know, I'm in seven different game systems at the same time. That's unheard of. There there's there's almost no one that I know that's playing in more than one or two games at the same time.

Most people are playing just in that one game that they have a personal nostalgic connection to. So, it's been a challenge actually to recruit players from other games. In some ways, it's easier to recruit players who have never played at all because the people who have committed to play by mail are committed overly to a single game system, and they're not wanting as much to try new things. The other challenge I think we've had is that game masters have been burned out over the last twenty or thirty years trying to market their games. And so they tended to kind of check out and just focus on their one game.

In fact, most of the game masters out there have day jobs. And this is something they do on nights and weekends as a fun side project. It may have been their primary career in the eighties or nineties, but now it's something they do on the side. And only in a very, very few number of cases are there companies that are actually generating revenue from running games commercially. In most cases, Game Master is putting in more time than the money they're deriving from the turn fees.

Right. Looking at turn fees and whatnot from an economics point of view, you'd have to have a huge player base in order to make a profit, I would think. Yeah. And what's what's interesting to me is as I promote Play By Mail games to other types of gamers, especially board gamers or role playing gamers, and and they go, wait. It costs money to play this game?

What? \$5 a turn? Are you crazy? Like, I can't afford that. And I have I have two comments to that.

First of all, someone's buying a game, whether it's you or the game master, you know, if in case if it's a board game, that's 40 to \$80. In the case of role playing games, it's actually more. And and miniatures, it's astronomically more money because you're spending hundreds of dollars on, you know, miniatures, paints, materials. You know, there's there's this false sense of cost that comes, as a trade off. And the other comment is, I mean, these are people who have no problem, you know, dropping 5 to \$7 a day on a latte or a frappuccino or a candy bar.

There's a weird perception that gaming should be free. I think some of this has been ruined by other economic models. For instance, you know, I'm I'm playing an MMO for free right now called Diablo Immortal, which came out a few weeks ago on phones and tablets, and it's free. Right? But they're hoping that 1% of the players will spend money on upgrades.

And I think that model has has has caused challenges for play by mail games because of the the the sense that gaming has shifted towards free business models with an upsell component. And in the case of board games, oftentimes, you're not the one buying the board game. You're showing up at your friend's house and they already own it. Yeah. Yeah.

And I know when I used to play, for example, when I played Midgard back in the early two thousands, I was spending about a \$100 a month. I had nine clans, nine cities that I ran, and I loved every second of it. And I and I remember back then, I wasn't working in a job that paid well. So I went and donated plasma every month so I could afford to play. Wow.

You know, I've always loved the the turn based gaming because I I tend to be a very sort of cerebral person on the on the Myers Briggs personality. I'm an INTJ. I'm in my head a lot. And I'm I'm INTP, and I think there is a connection. I think I think there are looking at Myers Briggs specifically, I think there are certain types, personality types that that this is a perfect genre of games.

Like, the ideal gaming genre for me is turn based gaming. Absolutely. For other people who may be extroverted, an e on the Myers Briggs, this may be an isolating type of experience for them and they would prefer to go play a board game with friends over a beer. Yeah. Exactly.

And I would rather be in my head in in sort of plotting and in in thinking about what I'm doing and, you know, putting it all together. It it's it's been a a wonderful gaming experience over the years, and I am very grateful that I've reconnected with that. And I'm able to produce this podcast and try to spread the word that, turn based gaming exists. And it's a lot of fun, and I'd like for there to be a a new renaissance within the genre, which brings me to my third point. Let's talk a little bit about the future of turn based gaming, the future of play by mail gaming.

What do you see as possibilities? Well, I've been back to the hobby for four and a half years, played actively from childhood into early

college, and then for all sorts of reasons in the mid nineties, I stopped playing. You know, I I did a cross country move. I got married. I had kids.

I changed jobs. Lots of reasons why Play My Mail fell away from focus for me during that period. The the increase in the Internet and Internet based gaming and and multiplayer video games, console games came out during that time. You know, I had an Xbox and was playing a lot of Halo with friends online. But back in March of of twenty eighteen, I got came back to the hobby.

And so it's been four and a half years for me back playing, probably a dozen or or a dozen and a half different game systems in that time, and I'm playing seven seven games now, Hyborian War, Nightguild, Middle Earth, Supernova, Takamo, TribeNet, and a a beta of a new space game called Raid that just came out. And actually, I spent four and a half years not only playing, but trying to be an advocate in the hobby, writing about it, creating in various groups, building online forums. And four and a half years of rolling boulders uphill, it feels a little bit you know, I'm trying to share my enthusiasm, but I've only seen in that four and a half year period of time a decrease in activity. There's there's now less games than there were four and a half years ago, and there are less players. So it it's it's been frustrating to me personally because as someone going back to your point about Myers Briggs, as someone who is introspective, a little bit introverted, and liked to kinda daydream a bit in my head and and plan and think about things.

You know, for me, it's the perfect genre. You know, I go play a board game and I leave the board game feeling like, but it could have been so much more. Like, we just scratched the surface of this really amazing experience. And I think for anybody out there that feels like, you

know, they experience some fun in whether that's role playing or board gaming or online gaming, but they feel like there's it's just not immersive enough. It's just not as perfectly suited to their personality.

This is the kind of game I think that they're looking for. And, unfortunately, it's a small community and getting smaller every year. And when you figure out how do we recruit players, how do we attract players to this hobby? It's a big challenge. I don't know.

Yeah. Like we were talking a little bit about before we press record, it seems to be that the player base is popular the the current player base within turn based gaming is currently populated mostly by gen xers like yourself boomer population. They're in their sixties and seventies. So checking email is hit or miss and communicating with them. If you send off for a setup, you may get one in a couple of weeks or you may not.

And and and that's frustrating. And Yep. It needs to be I think the the Gen Xers need to be the game masters now and then the the the millennials need to be the players. And I'm of course, I jest. I mean, I I want everybody who wants to be a part of this Of course.

Genre to, you know, to to be a part. I'm I'm and I'm not ages, so so nobody, nobody tried to crucify me. But I guess for the future of the genre, there needs to be younger people coming in. Like, when you were 13 and you were playing, when I was in my Absolutely. When I was in my teens and in the military and I was playing, I mean, I I was playing mid guard when turns were being processed once every six months.

I mean, we we still stuck in. We still stuck with it because it was such a great game. I agree. You

know, I have I have four kids aged 17 to 26, and none of them play play by mail games. I have tried multiple times get them interested in the hobby, and, you know, they kinda turn their head sideways at Lango Mango.

I don't get it. You know? And these are the same kids who love playing board games. They love doing role playing games, and they play a lot of video games. But when I explain the hobby and the benefit and why it's great, you know, I've they I have lost that battle numerous times, and I don't quite understand why because they like gaming in general.

They're gaming kids. And, you know, the notion of a two week turnaround where you, you know, you get your orders back and then you spend couple weeks planning and writing ideas down and submitting your orders, that seems like such an anachronism to them. Whereas to me, because I have these little ten to fifteen minute chunks of time between other responsibilities as a working adult, it's perfect. Yeah. Because I can I can I can work on these when I have a little bit of free time?

I can't get together with friends and play board games as much as I'd like to because it's a four to six hour commitment and then COVID messed that up. To me, this is the perfect genre of games and I and I it it feels to me as though the people who would love it just don't even know it exists. I mean, that's one of the problems. It's how do you actually get the word out that this type of genre exists. There are so many popular YouTube channels for board game reviews.

I mean, with hundreds of thousands followers. And these are people who are passionately committed to the board gaming hobby. I would guess that 99% of them don't even know that play by mail or turn based gaming exists. And

I'm trying to get at least one of these YouTubers to actually do a special episode just on turn based gaming because that could fundamentally change the trajectory, I think, of this health. Oh, absolutely.

And and, you know, I was reflect as I as you're talking, I'm reflecting on the past, present, and the future of turn based gaming, and I was thinking about my own self. I mentioned my personality type. And looking back at at who I am as a person and and what's always energized me, and I've always been a sort of do it yourself person, a DIY person. When I was a teenager, I was putting out my own fanzine because I was a commercial art vocational student in vocational school, so I was putting out my own zine. Whenever I read comics, I was a big comic collector.

I usually gravitated towards the the, the independently published comics and not the, you know, DC or Marvel, but everything else, but other than DC and Marvel. And I tend to watch more YouTube videos than anything else. Although, I'm I'm enjoying the sort of, nerd renaissance that we live in now where, you know, there's Star Wars and Star Trek and all sorts of things, but I I still have that do it yourself spirit. And play by mail gaming always seem to kind of fit into that category. Yeah.

Back in the eighties, you had, like, TSR, which was bought out by Wizards of the Coast, and you had all these big companies that produce these games. But then you had the guy who created a game and ran it through the mail. And I just thought that was awesome and fascinating. And like you, I probably got introduced to the genre through Dragon Magazine or through through some other magazine, and I know I had I've I had written articles as a teenager for both Paper Mayhem and Flagship Magazine. But I think I was at a

convention, and there was a booth by a play by mail company, and I think that's how I initially got introduced to the genre.

And then once I got sort of my my foot wet and and started playing a game, then those ads that I saw in magazines, I I was more I was more interested in trying them out because I'd already played a game because I met somebody at a convention. I remember Anton Games, which offered the game Family Wars. I remember getting into that, and and I loved it. And I I just looked them up, and they've been defunct since, I think, the mid nineties. Oh, yeah.

And it just makes me sad because that was a good game. And with a little updating and maybe not even updating, maybe just offer it as it was back then. It it was a good game, and there was a lot of good games out there. And some are still around, but a lot are gone. A lot are gone.

The good news is is there are still some great ones that are that are available, and and I hope they will continue to be made available. I think we're we're getting ready for a whole generational shift. You know, a lot of the game masters are in their sixties and going on into their seventies. I think you're gonna see a transition. And my hope is that transition is to hand the game over to another game master and not for those games to get retired because there are some games that have been running for decades, and they're in a rich immersive world.

And it's such a great experience being a part of that. I wouldn't wanna see those come to an end. I mean, one of the things that that we should talk about a little bit, if we've hinted to it, I think, chatting for this podcast is, you know, the turns themselves aren't what inherently

makes play by mail an interesting hobby. I mean, certainly, it's great to get results back and to read over your multi page turns and see what happened and understand the change in your position from turn one to turn two. Well, the the something that's magical is what you do between turns.

Right? So it's a combination of outreaching to other players, doing diplomacy, making deals, and trades, but also just drive time. I mean, both you and I spent a fair amount of time in our cars back and forth to various places, and I'm plotting and planning my turn while I'm driving. You know, I'm you I'm using that that cognitive cerebral capability while I'm doing other things to come up with my plans for the next turn. And there's really no other genre of games where you play a game when you're not playing the game.

That's right. And, it's really exceptional. You can you can offload a lot of that time to personal time and think about things and plan and strategize when you're not actually doing your orders. Yeah. That's right.

And and that's one of the things that I really, really like about turn based gaming is the the plotting, the imagination, the working on stuff in between the processing of the turns. That that's really where the magic happens. I agree. And I know one thing, you you know, you mentioned long car rides through work and whatnot. I have recently downloaded some music that I used to listen to when I did my turns way back in the eighties and early nineties.

And and and it's all, like, instrumental new agey music that I got from Columbia House that, you know, remember Columbia House? Oh, where you get, like Oh, yeah. 15 cassettes or whatever. And so I'm relistening to some of this music in

my car as I think about these games, and it's it's really helping me get into the the mindset that I used to have because, you know, part of it's learning how to kind of think a little bit differently. Playing a board game like Risk, you you think a certain way.

But when you play a a turn based play by mail gaming that that may last years as long as you like, an open ended game. Your thinking is different when it comes to the game. You have to be a long term strategist. You have to and and it's really about building relationships with multiple people over a long period of time. Agreed.

And, you know, I mean, there was a a situation, I won't mention any names, but there was some grudges from from twenty some years ago, and those grudges are still there. It's like they never ended. And, you know, I'm I look back and I'm like, I am not the same person I was was twenty years ago. But but but to in the gaming community, maybe I'm perceived as that same 20 arrogant obnoxious kid that I was. But it's just Mhmm.

I my hope is that the future will be good for turn based gaming, and everything goes in kinda cycles. And if the eighties if the the ten years from late eighties to the late nineties was sort of the golden age, and then we had a slump period, my hope is that we're on the rise and that good things are gonna happen. That that would be great. But I think at this point, you know, four and a half years back to the hobby, I become a little bit cynical. I try not to think of myself as a as a cynical person.

I like to be an optimist and not a pessimist, but part of it is I've been ground down for four and a half years trying to advocate and evangelize the hobby. Where I'm at personally, and I just my own opinion, is we need a breakthrough

moment. You know? I thought it was gonna be COVID, but none of the GMs in the hobby took advantage of that for marketing. I think the breakthrough moment we need in this hobby is probably to harness some of that enthusiasm for board gaming, which probably means getting one of the YouTube personalities who covers board gaming like a shut up and sit down or dice tower or one of these guys to actually do an episode on turn based gaming and to do a deep dive.

Like, what is the hobby? How is it different? What are the pros and cons? Why would some board gamers like this hobby versus others? And to me, that's the best opportunity, I think, is to take some of that enthusiasm for you know, we're we're in the golden age of board gaming.

Since about 2012, it's been about ten years. There's been a massive increase in board gaming, and that, I think, is where we need to look for growth. And I just don't know how we can do it without getting one of the advocates of the board gaming community to become at least a communicator about the turn based gaming community. Well, one thing that we can do is any one of us could start a TikTok and talk about turn based gaming. Yeah.

I have a YouTube account, and I will probably make this podcast available on YouTube. That doesn't mean anybody's gonna gonna gonna listen to it on YouTube, but but we'll we'll most likely have a YouTube channel as well. It just needs to go viral a little. The only problem is if it goes viral a lot, most of these companies wouldn't be able to handle a thousand setup I mean, it would certainly be nice to see if a couple of companies could, but I know that, you know, many of them would probably not be able to handle a massive influx of players. But it would certainly be a a a good problem to have.

And Yeah. Absolutely. And if that did become an issue, I mean, if there was a huge influx of either our generation, the Gen x, or even the younger millennials, an influx of players, and some of the games just weren't able to handle the the the massive numbers. Well, then hopefully, new game masters would start up and and new games would come out. And and and that's where I think the future would be with with new innovation in the hobby.

Yeah. I I've been told that the TV show Stranger Things did cause a a growth in the role playing gaming, people coming back to Dungeons and Dragons. I haven't seen any data that confirms that. But anecdotally, I've heard that Stranger Things did boost some role playing gaming because that plays a role in in that TV show. So maybe we just need, you know, kind of a a media or cultural event like that.

You know, there is a a novel about play by mail games called Wolf in White Band that is probably not a mainstream story that could necessarily be turned into a television series or a film. But, you know, if you have maybe the inclusion of turn based gaming into one of these media events, maybe that would be a key as well. Yeah. Or maybe if somebody could do, like, a documentary, that would be neat too. But, you know, regardless of what happens, I'm I'm glad I've rediscovered turn based gaming, and I'm certainly glad that you have as well.

Throughout the years, I had wondered what happened to you, and now we were able to reconnect because it's a Yeah. The that's a small world, and the community is a small community. And it was funny because I think we we connected not knowing that we, had that connection, and then we put the dots together. And we're like, oh, yeah. We we we know each other and and that was, that was kinda neat.

And I know I remember back, like, some of the games I played. And and let's end on a on a sort of a nostalgic note since you mentioned nostalgia. And I I was gonna talk about some of the games that I played way way back when. I remember playing It's a Crime, the the the New York, gang warfare game, and I still remember some of the the position names of some of the top 10 players. I know there was one, degenerate pond scum.

It's a name that I'll never forget. And they were they were a a a gang that that I think, took me out of the game. And then I told you I I played family wars and loved that game, and I played a game called divine wind briefly. And it was, it was a great game, and my character's name, it was a the game was about Japanese, medieval warfare. And, it was, like a a board game, but they had special actions.

And my main character was, Toshiro Takakoshi, and I negotiated the the marriage between my daimyo and the, another player's daughter, and his name his character's name was Lord Okami. I mean, you know, it was just, through a series of special actions through the game. We united our two positions through marriage in the game, and it was just neat. And all the different games that I played, I have these memories of. And, I kinda wanted to end on that, but I wanted you to maybe share some of your memories, from the games that you've played in the past.

I I have so many. And in fact, I'm gonna be writing an article about about this in an upcoming issue of Suspense and Decision magazine called 10 true childhood stories for play by mail gaming. But I'll I'll just share one of those 10 stories. I got a bunch. Back in, 1985 when I was 12 years old, I was playing a game called Earthwood.

Earthwood was by a a a PBM company called Game Systems Incorporated. Most people knew of them as GSI. They were based in Miami, Florida. They ultimately went on to create the the game Middle Earth PBM, which is still being run today by a company in Cardiff, Wales, UK, which bought the rights to it and is running it now if you go to middleearthgames.com. But I was playing in a game of Earthwood back in 1985 when I was 12, a position called the Rumanians, which was kind of like a Greek civilization.

And, you know, back then, you would send three by five cards in the in the orders. You would put a three by five card, you know, to this position from this position in the envelope, and then the game master would pass along those note cards. I wish I kept those note cards from when I was a kid because they were amazing. Someone had illustrations on them and, just incredible. So I received a a note card from the Mammoth Man, which was a position near me.

He included his phone number, which is pretty common. And so I was a kid 12 year old kid talking to an adult, which is a little bit, you know, interesting, negotiating with an adult for, for this position. And I had to pay long distance, very expensive, and we had plans to work together. And, share I shared all the details about where my armies were gonna be, and we're gonna arrive at this place at this turn. And then several turns later, his entire military force shows up at my capitol and kills me.

So, you know, here I was, this trusting little kid talking to an adult thinking we were gonna be best friends and only learned that I was back stabbed. So, you know, those kinds of experiences, I think, really help to inform kind of the naivete of of being a kid player and realizing that there was a brutal a brutal player base that wanted to win that you had to be

careful about, negotiating with. Yeah. I think we all have those stories of of betrayal and and and whatnot. And I I tend not to be that kind of player.

If I tell you something, I'm I'm gonna Yeah. I'm gonna follow through with that. I'm the same way. And, you know, I tend to you know, my word, I hope, will mean something. Although, when you're talking with a stranger, you don't know what their intents and motivations are, and they don't know whether you're a trustworthy person.

So, you know, trust is hard. You have to rebuild from scratch every time because you're dealing with new people. But, you know, not every game is like that. I mean, there are some that are military focused. I know that that your, podcast title is, you know, more around the military focused terms.

But some play by mail games are much more role playing or character focused than they are about moving militaries on the battlefield and engaging in warfare. You know, I would say most of the play by mill games that I'm playing now, warfare is only one of many components. And in fact, in a couple of the games that I've been playing the longest, I've never actually been at battle at all. Yeah. I'm not a I'm not a combat based player.

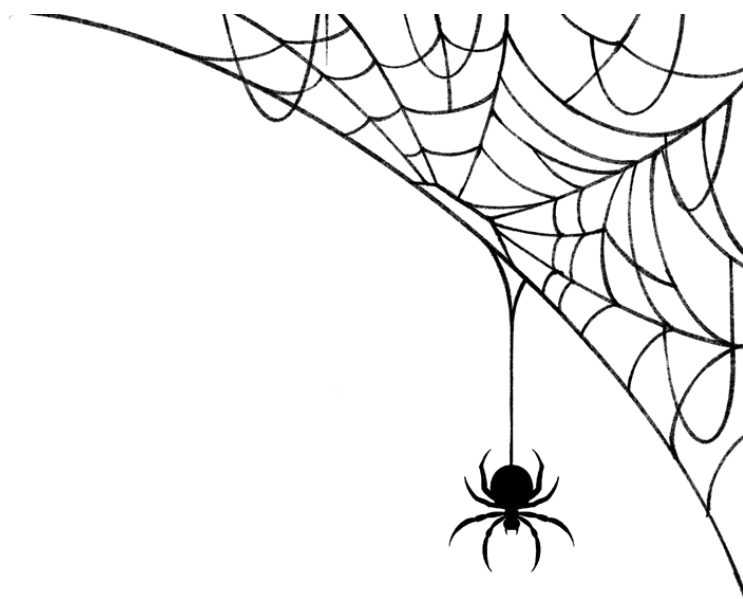
I'm more of a civilization builder. But when it came to coming up with the name for, the podcast, that's always a challenge. And it's always it's just it's very challenging. So I picked combat conditional because it's a a term that was part of Midgard and now Nightguild, a game that I I'm very very fond of. And when I was trying to come up with a with a name, I I kept kind of coming back to play by mail, but I know that's a term that's become kind of anachronistic with some.

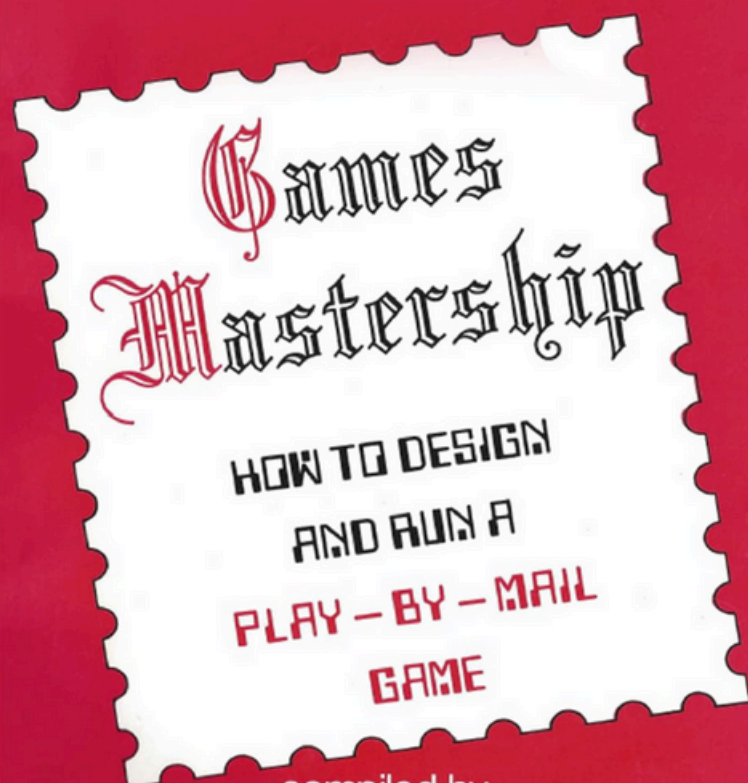
So, I I didn't wanna use like the play by mail podcast because that would alienate certain people and then then we had the whole the new term of turn based gaming. So I decided, this this phrase combat conditional just kept coming back and I thought, well, maybe that's a sign I'll use that. And if it doesn't work, later I can rebrand and come up with a new name. But for now, combat conditional it is until it doesn't serve our purpose and then we'll just go ahead and change it. But, naming's always a challenge.

But we are almost at an hour mark. I thank you, Raven, for your time. It's always good talking to you, and I would, of course, love to have you on as a regular guest host on this podcast as we promote turn based gaming. That'd be great. I'm looking forward to future episodes of your podcast.

Thank you for listening. My name is David Oliver Kling, and I have been your host. I have been playing turn based gaming since I was a teenager back in 1986. I love this genre of gaming, and I hope you do, too. Please check out our sponsor, Suspense and Decision magazine.

And may your turns always arrive on time and good gaming.





compiled by

CAROL & KEN MULHOLLAND

This book is intended to help anyone who dreams of designing his own Play By Mail (PBM) game and setting up his own small firm to run it, by providing accurate information about the pitfalls and the stepping-stones involved.

We've tried to cover as much as possible, without going into exhaustive detail about those aspects of managing a small business which can be easily obtained from other sources.

Welcome to the short-lived but bright-burning fad of PBM (play-by-mail) gaming.

David K. Spencer presents the fascinating history of this overlooked gaming niche that brought together players from around the world in an age when email was aspirational and the web had yet to be spun. Through feuds and friendships, bonds formed and community developed. Hundreds of games were available, many of them lasting for years. Players attended conventions. Some got married. A few went to jail.

Then it all fell apart. Technology slew the postal dragon.

This is the untold story of off-line multi-player gaming and how its decline heralded the rise of the massive, immensely popular online games of today.

PAPER DREAMS

A History of Play-by-Mail Gaming



David K. Spencer

Foreword by Steve Jackson

Feudal Lords

Rick Loomis PBM



Feudal Lords simulates the struggle for kingship in a mythical period of English history. In the year 801 A.D. following the death of King Arthur, Britain is left without a legitimate successor to the throne. Can YOU unite Britain and become the new King of Britain?

- Up to 17 players in each game.
- 46 fiefdoms controlled by player or non-player computer opponents.
- Each player represents the head of a noble family and controls one fiefdom.

<http://www.rickloomispbm.com/feudal.html>

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

BY SNAIL MAIL!

THINK YOU HAVE WHAT IT
TAKES TO SURVIVE THE
SKELETON APOCALYPSE?



GALVIDIERE



Galac-Tac Meets The Guillotine

Charles Mosteller

Well, not quite. I needed a colorful title for this article, though, and guillotine and Galac-Tac both start with the letter “G.”

All is fair in love and war, they say, and Galac-Tac is a PBM wargame, after all. I’ve been writing about it more and more, of late, in recent issues of PBM Chaos. So, it’s on my mind a lot, these days, as far as PBM things go.

Here lately, I’ve been reading more and more about Galac-Tac. Articles and reviews about the game written in previous years that were authored by a variety of different individuals, as well as some old postings gathering dust in an old **Galac-Tac Google Group** created back in the PBM year of 2008, have served as literary fodder for me.

Wikipedia credits Galac-Tac as having been first published by Phoenix Publications in 1982. Delta Games started running Galac-Tac in 1990, and between then and now, Talisman Games took the helm of Galac-Tac, and has been running it ever since. Feel free to sending any corrections, if I erred in this brief recounting.

The game, itself, has undergone quite a few changes since it first saw the light of day way back when play by mail gaming was still going strong. Galac-Tac first appeared on the PBM gaming scene several years before I did, in fact.

In the process of looking at PBM games, and exploring them, and studying them, and turning over the stones of them to peek underneath, I will from time to time criticize or complain about a wide variety of things. It’s really not the

equivalent of breaking out a guillotine on whatever PBM game that I have under my PBM microscope at the time, though.

I get that people who have designed various PBM games over the decades develop an attachment, sometimes even a very deep affinity, for their PBM babies. I'm really not out to kill off PBM games, nor am I here to lob the heads off of whatever PBM game that my focus is upon at the moment.

Back in Issue #5 of the original Suspense & Decision magazine, which was the March 2014 issue, I wrote an article titled **Tangled Up: Stuck in a PBM Web of Our Own Creation.**

It's an article that spans four pages in that PBM publication, and that PBM magazine was one of the predecessors of PBM Zombies. Much of my basic philosophy about the art of criticism from that time to now remains firmly intact.

Everyone is entitled to their opinion on any and all matters pertaining to PBM gaming, generally, or to any particular PBM game, specifically. Everyone last one of us is entitled to our opinions, and to agree or to disagree, whether in whole or in part, with anything or everything that has ever written on any PBM subject.

My gut feeling is that PBM gaming and PBM games will still be around long after I am dead and gone. Let's hope so, anyway. But my time left is a lot shorter than it used to be, and so I tend to voice my opinions, my criticisms, my complaints, my praise while I am still alive and kicking.

And the thing about opinions is that we all have them, and they all stink.

Opinions sometimes clash!





Compared to the level of criticism and complaints that I leveled against Fall of Rome, Centurion, and Alamaze in past years, the amount of criticism and complaints that I have voiced about Galac-Tac literally pale in comparison.

The easy, less-headache-filled path would be for me to say nothing, at all, about any PBM game. Just let these PBM companies and PBM GMs figure it all out by themselves. Why get involved? Why argue with the wind?

Well, for one, I care. I care about PBM. I don't have a vested interest in PBM gaming dying, nor in any specific PBM game dying. Ultimately, I don't control what changes do or do not get made to PBM games owned by others.

In fact, they can take as long as they want to, before implementing any change, or before making any attempt, whatsoever, to address

any particular complaint made by anyone about their PBM game, whether by myself or anyone else.

When I first encountered Rick McDowell of Alamaze fame online some twenty or so years ago, it was in a Yahoo! PBM Design discussion group, if memory serves me correctly.

Rick had made a posting in that group, and it was one of many different postings by many different people in that group that I read. Rick sought feedback about his Fall of Rome game and its website.

So, I took him up on his invitation to provide feedback, and I praised some things while criticizing numerous other things. Rick and I kind of hit it off, and he liked the fact that I was willing to criticize a game that I liked and saw substantial potential in. Rick McDowell understood the value of criticism, critique,

and complaints in the context of PBM game design.

Now, did he and I always agree on everything about Fall of Rome, first, then Centurion, second, and then Alamaze, third? *Not at all.*

He poured a lot of money into his efforts to bring the equivalent of PBM games in modern formats - something unusual, but something that commanded both my respect and my admiration.

And one of the things that I complained about was the fact that I felt like some of the companies who were trying to “help him” struck me as not a good use of the money that he paid them to do certain things.

Even to this day, though I haven’t talked to him in some time, I still count him as a personal friend.



I provided a lot of feedback to Rick McDowell over a period of many years about the games that he designed. I departed at some point, and now and again, I would check back in on him. He put a ton of effort into trying to get the right combination that would appeal to modern day gamers.

A good many years on down the road, he eventually sold Alamaze to John Mulholland, whom I also ended up providing a good bit of feedback to on his efforts with Alamaze. John could tell you that I didn’t hesitate to criticize Alamaze after he took over.

John is a great guy. I really like him, and it was good to see somebody else who was willing to invest time, energy, effort, and money into remolding Alamaze into a game for modern gamers. He’s still hard at work on it, in fact, but it’s not always quick and smooth and easy.



Rick didn't have all of the answers, and neither did John, and neither do I. In fact, I'm not aware of anyone in all of PBM gaming, be they PBM GMs or PBM designers or PBM players, who has all the answers.

After all, every PBM game is different. And PBM suffers from more than one problem or shortcoming, simultaneously. That's just the hard and harsh reality of PBM gaming, today.

Not everyone wants help. I understand that perfectly well. But opinions about PBM games do not form based solely upon whether PBM companies or PBM GMs want help. A lot of my opinions about PBM have been ignored by many people down through the years. But I still have my opinions about everything, and so do each and every last one of you out there reading this.



With regard to Galac-Tac, specifically, I see a game that started out as an old school PBM game, but which is now a digital lineal descendant of the postal-play PBM games of old - that has a lot of potential in it.

Unexploited potential.

It's a decent game, but one that suffers from an under-populated player base. Personally, I think that's a darned crying shame.

And maybe it will stay that way, from here on out. It's not a life or death issue, either way, but I can't help but to wonder why this modern day PBM game isn't overflowing with players?

There's all kinds of games and other forms of entertainment readily available in today's society. *Perhaps Galac-Tac's time has passed.*

I tend to talk about a particular PBM game a lot, when I am focused on it and when I am exploring it. For a while there, I was playing in numerous different games of Alamaze, simultaneously - *a half-dozen or so.*

Now, I'm not playing it, at all. I've moved on. At present, my focus is upon another PBM game, one called Galac-Tac. At some point, I'll probably move on from it. For me, the issue is less what PBM game will I mosey on over to next, and more will there even be anymore PBM games that will serve as the next one for me?

Right now, everything's going pretty smooth with PBM Chaos, and as you can plainly see when this Issue #2 of PBM Zombies arrives in your digital hands, PBM Zombies is still going, also. Neither have collapsed and fallen into the bottomless PBM Abyss.

That doesn't mean that they won't, eventually, because they certainly will, at some point.



PBM magazines only last just so long, you know, as all of the PBM magazines of the past clearly demonstrate.

Do I take the chance and run the risk of offending somebody, or do I just stand back and wait for Galac-Tac to eventually get to wherever it is going all on its own, wherever that might be, if anywhere?

Perhaps Galac-Tac has reached the zenith of its evolution as a PBM game. Maybe it can't - *or won't* - be improved any beyond where it currently stands. Possibly, changes to Galac-Tac are a done deal, over and done with, no mas, no more.

And if that is the case, then so be it. The world won't end, either way. Life will carry on. There are a host of other PBM games for me to focus

on.

A PBM game, any PBM game including Galac-Tac but not limited thereto, is many things, simultaneously. Sure, we tend to think of PBM games as just games, or as turn-based games. That's what they are, after all.

When I look at Galac-Tac, I also see it as an exercise in the presentation of information. Because that, too, is exactly what it is - *the presentation of information that is intended as a form of entertainment*.

In the PBM sphere, PBM GMs have a tendency to focus upon rewriting old PBM rulebooks. At times, they end up with more of what they already had, before they started down the job of rewriting their respective PBM rulebooks. Is that the actual solution, though?

Any given subset of information can be presented in a wide array of different ways. The totality of Galac-Tac's information, or any portion thereof, can be presented as they are, or they can be presented different from how they've been presented at any point along the way.

Everyone has their own way of looking at things. I certainly have my way of looking at things. I typically come at things from a variety of different angles. I see PBM's current approach to a lot of different things as dated, even archaic, but that doesn't mean that I see PBM games as obsolete, per se. Whether what I think about PBM games has any value or not, I leave

it to each of you to decide that for yourselves, as individuals and as fellow fans of play by mail gaming.

I suppose that eventually, I'll run out of things to say about PBM, generally, and about particular PBM games, specifically. When that time comes, we can all rest and breathe easily. *That time hasn't arrived, just yet, though.*

Don't you worry, though, because even as I write this and even as you read this, the clock just keeps on ticking.

Tick. . .tick. . .tick. . .

"I'm still (slowly) making improvements in GTAC, too, if you have any further suggestions. ***There's plenty to do that's still on the drawing board there, but every idea helps make it a better product.*** (We might even come up with a real-time, GTAC-based version of the game one day.)"

Talisman Games GM Davin Church

February 2nd, 2009

Galac-Tac Google Group

In a nutshell, can Galac-Tac be improved beyond where it currently is? Whether that's the game, itself, certain aspects of its design, it's methodology of information presentation, or any of the various different things about it that I've read people complain about, before, at various different points down through the years, including recently. *I think that it can, indeed, be improved.*

I read every last posting in that old Galac-Tac Google Group, last night. Prior to that, I've only read a few postings in it, here or there, in a rather scattered fashion. *But, boy, am I ever glad that I did read all of those years-old postings, lock, stock, and barrel!*

You might be surprised what you could learn, exploring such Caverns of Older Thought. I picked up on a number of different things. I even got to see Davin Church, himself, ask others for both a self-analysis of what motivates Galac-Tac players to quit playing (especially in a drastic fashion), and for a motivational analysis of why they would give up on a "free" position just because they're

below average in their Empire Valuation percentile, as well as why they would take time and effort to demolish their own infrastructure before they quit playing the game?

It's such a pity that there weren't more postings posted in that old Galac-Tac Google Group, back then, and that not all of Davin's inquiries to others playtesting changes that he had made to Galac-Tac generated more feedback than they did at that time.

That Google Group started way back on August 24th, 2008, some 17 years ago, and it was last posted to on January 12th, 2015. *Ironically, that last posting took place on one of my sisters' birthday.*

Back in 2008, Davin asked, ***"Is there a better way to improve starting game play?"***



That's a great question to ask. Could it be possible that starting game play in Galac-Tac could still be improved, even today, all these many years later?

Getting players more involved in the game sooner, and reducing the dropout rate due to lack of excitement, were issues that Galac-Tac GM Davin was focused upon more than a decade and a half ago. From what I can see and discern, Galac-Tac continues to have a problem with it's reduced-size player base.

You can't wholly eliminate player drop outs in any PBM game, but Galac-Tac has substantial room for improvement in both gaining new players, and in retention of existing (or former) players.

However, these aren't core problems that only Galac-Tac faces. Rather, these kinds of maladies are commonplace across a lot of different PBM games, these days.

On the very last day of the PBM year of 2024, Brekk posted the following over in the Alamaze forum, *"I'm thrilled to share that our player base has grown by almost 30 players since the start of the year!"* So, even today, growth of the player bases of PBM games and/or their digital lineal descendants is clearly still possible.

Change isn't something new to either Galac-Tac or Talisman Games. I realize that trying to fix or improve what was originally a PBM game played via the postal service can be a long and grueling journey. I know that complaints get old, and that criticisms can become tiring.

Progress, real and genuine progress, can take years, decades, or even a lifetime. There are things about Galac-Tac that I have criticized, and there are things about Galac-Tac that I have praised - and the exact, same thing can be said about me where numerous other PBM games are concerned.



I'm not a one-sided coin that only offers up praise about PBM games. In Issue #5 of Suspense & Decision, I said, ***"This magazine has no vested interest in preserving the status quo. The very act of this magazine coming into existence was a disruption of the status quo."***

Sure, we criticize, but we also advocate."

I also said, ***"Realistically, the chances of the PBM industry as a collective whole waking up and changing its entrenched approach to doing things is probably virtually nil."*** Additionally, I said, ***"The reason that Play-By-Mail gaming endures a lingering nightmare to its player base is because the PBM industry refuses to wake itself up out of its self-induced slumber."*** Yet, there have been some successes. More successes *can* be achieved.



If I were to eliminate criticism in my dialogues and articles about PBM games, then I would also eliminate praise, as well - *and complete coverage, to boot*. I'm not a praise bot, nor an unthinking clone. I'm a thinking individual, one with opinions that I form, possess, and share with others.

It is not my great desire in life is to hound any PBM GM or PBM company about anything, but equally true is that I am a firm believer in advocacy of what one believes - *and that basic philosophy extends unto all things PBM*. Complaints and criticisms facilitate and affirm the identification of problems. Identifying problems that exist is the first step in getting them fixed.

In all likelihood, we're not all just gonna see eye to eye on everything. But the world hasn't ended yet, because of it. Life goes on. PBM goes on, and honestly, issues and disputes and problems that pertain to PBM games are truly First World problems, when you get right down to it. Nothing in PBM nor about PBM rises to the level of an actual crisis. I always try to keep *that* in my line of sight.



Along the way of discussing and debating the problems and the issues and the finer points of PBM gaming and PBM games, we'll likely encounter some bumps and bruises and cuts and scrapes along the way. There will be the occasional personality clashes, philosophical clashes, and a variety of other clashes, as ideas and thoughts and concepts articulated play themselves out in the free marketplace of ideas.

More of the status quo of PBM isn't going to fix what ails and weighs down play by mail gaming. There's either better ways to do things in PBM, or there aren't. It's that cut and dry. *Happy gaming!*

IT'S A CRIME

A Facebook Fan Group



For fans of KJC Games'

It's A Crime PBM

ROBIN HOOD WEREGILD



ADVENTURES IN OLD NOTTINGHAMSHIRE:
OUTLAWS HUNTED IN THIS LEGENDARY PLAY-BY-EMAIL
GAME OF SURVIVAL AS MEDIEVAL OUTLAWS,
OR AS THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM & HIS HENCHMEN!

ArEMA

Rulebook Reductio

Shrinkage Is Not Always A Loss

Charles Mosteller

In this issue's PBM Personality Column #3, The Prospector dug into the topic of PBM rulebooks, picking away at what I will term "rulebook bloat."

As one who hates having to read lengthy PBM rulebooks, it is a subject near and dear to my PBM heart. As I have explained before, reading a PBM rulebook is *not* the same thing as playing a PBM game. If a person views reading rulebooks to be a chore, then that right there is an obstacle and an impediment to winning them over as a player to your PBM game.

The term "reductio" typically is found at the very beginning of a phrase, such as with the widely know example of reductio ad absurdum. For the title of this article, however, I decided to defy that common practice as a prelude to why PBM companies and PBM GMs should look more deeply at possibilities that may exist to inflict some shrinkage on the size of their rulebook packages.

More than two years ago, **in a post over in the Alamaze forum on August 10th, 2023**, I posted the following question: **Though it may at first seem counterintuitive, what if I were to tell you that explanations are not always the quickest and easiest way to "explain" things?**

I really don't think that it is the goal of any PBM company or PBM GM to ever set out to deliberately write rulebooks that are longer than they need to be to achieve the desired purpose of explaining how to play the PBM game that they have designed.

However, just because someone is good at designing a game to play does not automatically mean that their rulebook-writing skills are up to snuff. The two are entirely different skill sets.

"Ironically the video game industry seems to be moving in the opposite direction: largely eliminating instruction manuals altogether in favor of in-game tutorials and intuitive play mechanics."

The Prospector

In the closing sentence of his PBM Personality Column, The Prospector hit upon a couple of different techniques in his bid to take aim at this ongoing problem of rulebook bloat that continues to plague PBM games.

For PBM GMs and PBM players, alike, that claim and have long claimed that they don't have time, rulebook bloat exacerbates that "lack of time" problem.

Ignoring the problem won't fix the problem, for the very reason that ignoring problems never, ever fixes problems. But if you don't know how to fix a problem, then maybe that explains why certain problems in PBM gaming have never been fixed, to this very day.

Two sentences from the Galac-Tac Quick Start Guide come to mind. These are:

(1) The Galac-Tac game rules can be a bit daunting at first glance.

(2) For the easiest start, just ignore all the rules for designing new ships and go with the ships you've been given.

An admission by a PBM GM that the rules for their PBM Game can be daunting is a problem in its own right. Whether the current GM of Galac-Tac wrote all of the rules for that particular PBM game or not is irrelevant. If the rules are daunting, then they need to be transformed into a set of rules that is not daunting, whatsoever.

Separate and apart from that, if the easiest way to start playing a PBM game is by ignoring rules associated with that PBM game, then that is inherently problematic, also. What's the point of having rules to begin with, if the suggestion then becomes to ignore the rules, or ignore certain rules? ***Rules sometimes complicate!***

In-game tutorials can reduce the size of rulebooks and manuals for games by way of offloading information upfront from rulebooks and manuals. It's not that the information offloaded is wholly unimportant or any the less important. Rather, that particular information simply gets offloaded until a later point in time. Ever hear of "crossing that bridge when you get to it?" Well, that's what offloading information from rulebooks and manuals aim for. This approach reduces the initial information overload for gamers trying to learn how to play your game for the very first time.

With regard to "intuitive play mechanics," the more intuitive a game's interface is, the less that gamers needs to rely upon rulebooks to inculcate them with understanding of how to play the game in question.

Intuitiveness in game design allows the offloading of information integral to playing a game successfully from a rulebook in pursuit of "embracing of the obvious." In a nutshell, that's what intuitiveness is - ***making something so obvious that an explanation isn't even needed.***



The Prospector's touchstones of "in-game tutorials" and "intuitive play mechanics" are excellent examples of how to tackle to omnipresent problem in PBM gaming of rulebook bloat. To that dynamic duo of suggestions, I would also inject "infographics" as another mechanism that could be embraced and refined in the battle to embrace a better approach to instilling understanding of PBM games into newcomers to such games.

PBM rulebooks tend to take a sledgehammer approach to teaching others how to play PBM games. Instead of a sledgehammer (massive amounts of textual inundation) approach, perhaps a scapel approach might actually yield better results, in at least some, if not most, instances.

In Issue #49 of PBM Chaos, I incorporated an initial attempt by myself to craft an infographic for Galac-Tac. I present that same infographic again, below, to refresh the memory of those who previously saw it while reading that issue.

Now, I do not have a lot of first-hand experience creating infographics, and certainly not for the rulebooks of PBM games. However, I do believe that PBM infographics is a largely untapped, perhaps even previously unthought-of or undiscussed, way of approaching the core challenge of information presentation to the gaming community, at large.

A rulebook is, in a nutshell, the presentation of information. Instead of thinking of PBM rulebooks as a collection of rules, think about them, instead, as "presentations of information."

PBM rulebooks tend to make for some very dry and boring reading. When I encounter infographics online, what they tend to do is to take information and present it in a format that makes that very same information interesting to read. Infoposters also tend to present a given sub-set of information in ways that are attractive to the eye. Thus, even before you read them, your eye is already interested. It

The infographic is set against a dark blue background with a pattern of small, light blue stars. At the top, the title "Galac-Tac Resources" is displayed in a large, bold font, with "Galac-Tac" in purple and "Resources" in white. Below the title, the subtitle "Two Types of Resources" is written in a smaller, bold, yellow font. The infographic is divided into two columns. The left column features the large purple letters "PV" at the top, followed by the text "Production Value" and "Raw Material" in white. At the bottom of this column, a white text box contains the explanation: "PV is the maximum amount of raw material you can remove from any given Star System each turn." The right column features the large purple letters "PI" at the top, followed by the text "Production Inventory" and "Money" in white. At the bottom of this column, a white text box contains the explanation: "PI is the basic 'monetary' unit in the game and all costs are shown in PI."

already likes what it sees. Even rather mundane information about subjects that we've never really given much, if any, thought to before, all of a sudden appear to us as interesting. And it all boils down to presentation and informative style as much as to the underlying sub-set of information in particular that is being presented.

Infoposters tend to be colorful depictions of information. They're interesting to look at, plus they tend to be quick to browse or read - *which is the exact opposite of many PBM rulebooks.*

Could every part of every PBM rulebook be realistically converted into infographics or infoposters form? Probably not, if I had to venture a guess off the top of my head. Could any portions of PBM rulebooks be made into infographics? Probably so, in light of how infographics are utilized in such a vast amount of different fields to present complex information, data, or knowledge in a clear, concise, and visually appealing way that is easy to understand and share.

It's less about particular terms, such as infographics or infoposters, and more about utilization of a more visually interesting approach to the presentation of information. Research has revealed that the brain processes visual information significantly faster than text.

PBM rulebooks have historically and traditionally been comprised predominantly of masses of information in text form. That information must first be consumed, and then that very same information must be retained, in order to accomplish its core purpose for existing in the first place.

Anyone who has ever had a boring teacher should be able to appreciate that how information is presented can make a world of

difference to the one tasked with doing the learning.

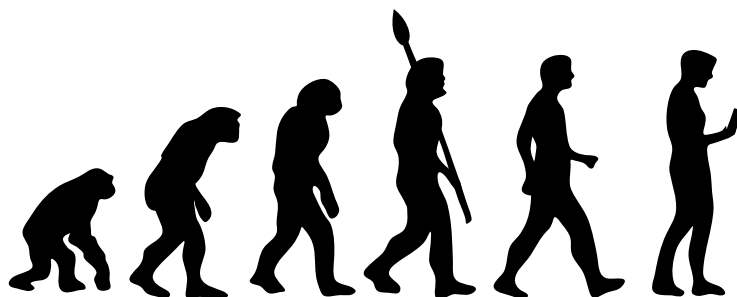
Is raw text the best way to present the informational challenge that PBM rulebooks comprise to the newcomer to PBM gaming? Or would some hybrid that focuses more on presenting the same information in a different, albeit more visually interesting way hold potential to help PBM companies and PBM GMs solve the challenge of making their text dumps that they call PBM rulebooks more palatable to a wider array of people?

What is the purpose of writing a PBM rulebook in the first place, and also, what is the purpose of rewriting a PBM rulebook that already exists?

If improvement is the objective of the latter, then improvement of what, specifically and exactly? All things considered, has PBM gaming advanced very far since the height of its golden era decades ago, where its approach to PBM documentation is concerned?

What if a different path to crafting PBM game documents could yield a more attractive end product, one that also aids in information comprehension and retention by those who undertake to read such PBM documents?

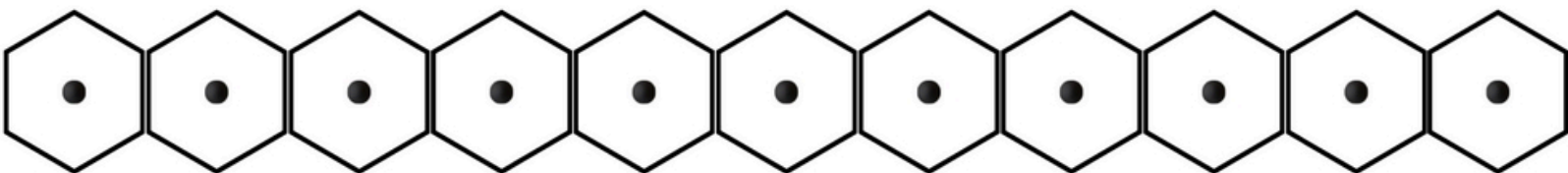
It's not about perfection. Rather, it's about improvement. If no one has time, these days, then what makes any PBM GM think that people have time to read big sprawling masses of text, just to learn how to play a game that, in some instances, may already be decades old?



Star Fleet



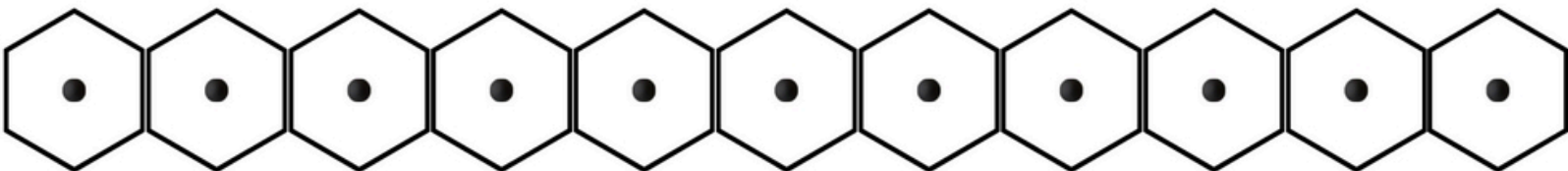
WARLORD



Strategic Campaign in the High Arena



The Feds
Klingons
Romulans
Hydrans
Gorns
Lyran
Andromedans
all await you!



* The idea for the planet-destroying, robot Berserkers comes from stories written and copyrighted by Fred Saberhagen, and is used with his permission.

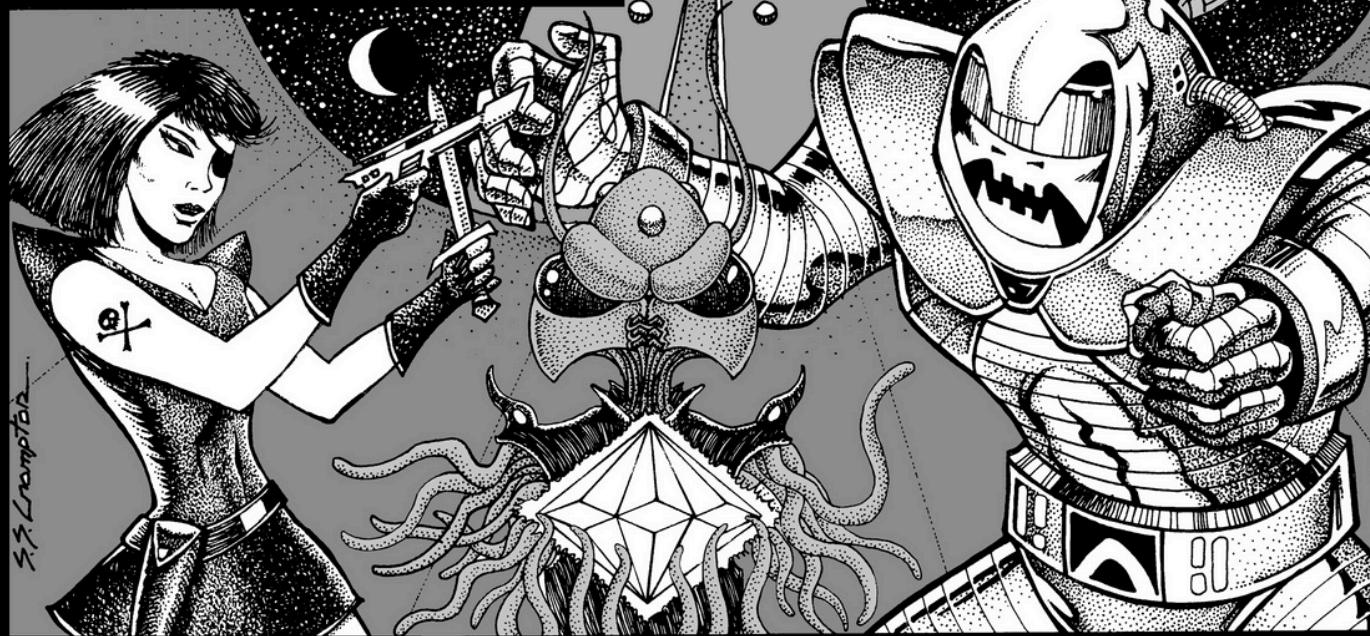
STARWEB™

Starweb is waiting for you!

Choose your destiny!

Apostle
Artifact Collector
Berserker
Empire Builder
Merchant
Pirate

RickLoomisPBM.com

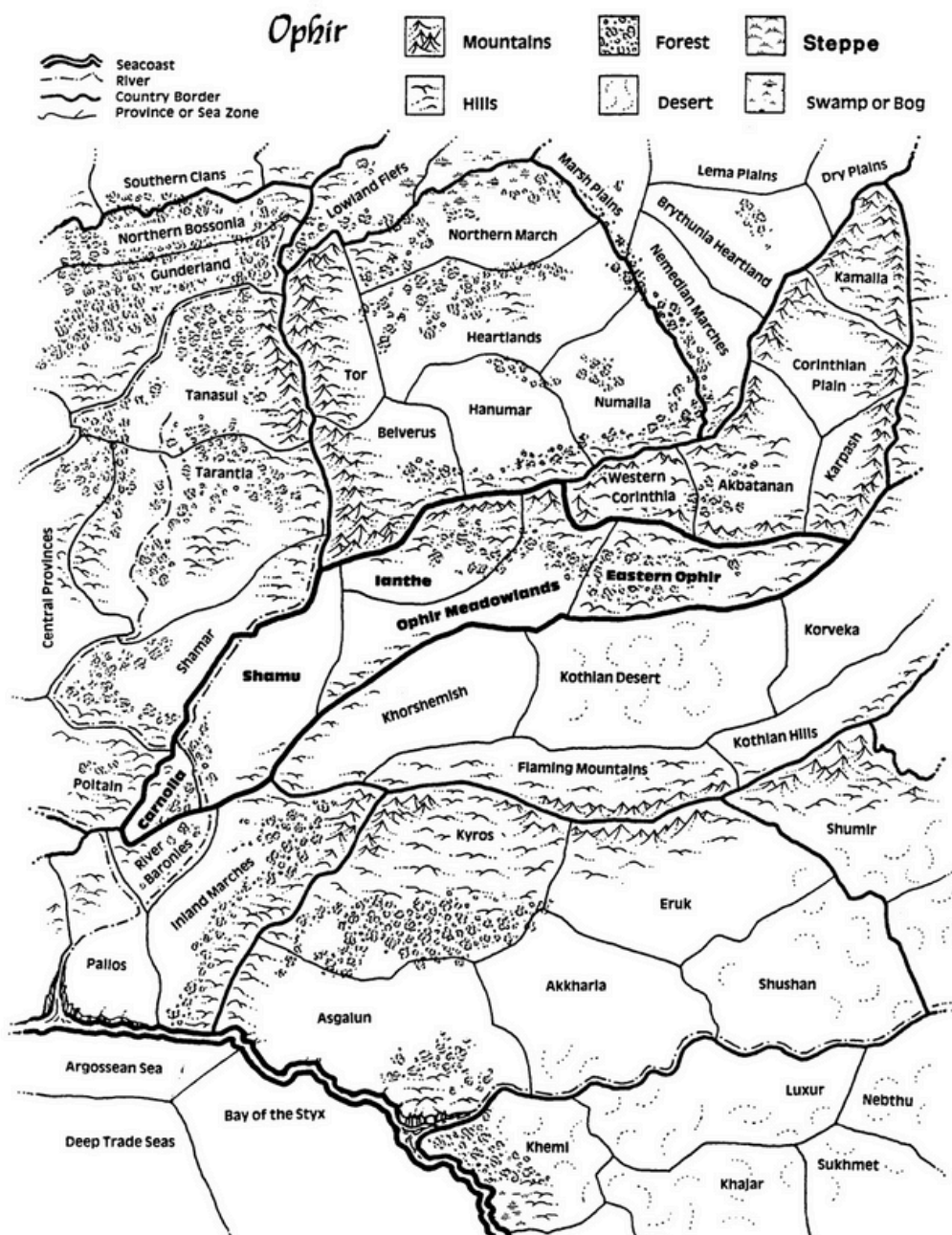


255 Star Systems

Interstellar greatness awaits!

games@rickloomispbm.com

#(480)945-6917



OPHIR (Medium Kingdom)

A Kingdom of great beauty with gilded knights and high towered cities, Ophir is protected by natural boundaries of mountain and river on all sides but to the south which the Ophirians have well fortified. The Ophirian army is provided for with all that wealth can purchase including the finest training, weapons, and arms as well as being additionally strengthened by mercenary archers from Shem. Unassuming Ophir is powerful enough to begin the red road to empire but small enough to avoid threatening the larger Kingdoms.

[Click on the map to download Ophir's Kingdom Report!](#)

Hyborian War: A Play-By-Mail Game With A Wealth Of Choices

Charles Mosteller

Everyone is entitled to their opinion on all things PBM. One play by mail game that I have a lot of opinions on, simultaneously, is Hyborian War. Personally, I think that it is a fabulous game, and with thirty-six different kingdoms available for play, just having that many kingdoms to choose from is one of the truly greatest treasures in all of play by mail gaming.

In fact, most of these thirty-six player kingdoms, I still haven't tried my hand at playing. And honestly, I'm all the poorer for it. Ophir is one of those kingdoms

that my PBM heart yearns to play. Maybe one day, I will, in spite of my current absence from the battlefields of Hyborian War.

Ophir is a kingdom with really decent troops, and 70% of those troops can be heavy troops. Having been on the opposite end of battles against Ophir, before, I can tell you upfront that Ophir is no easy pushover. It's a kingdom that can bleed your armies, if you're not careful.

Geography-wise, Ophir resides in the Northwest quarter of the **Hyborian War Wall Map**. If you've never played Hyborian War before, the Northwest quarter of the map is definitely where you want to be.

Why? Because that's where the action comes hot and heavy and often. Ophir sits in a real danger zone. You'll definitely get your money's worth, if you can play Ophir and survive.

With lots of potential enemies, as well as lots of potential opportunities for Ophirian expansion by way of conquering bordering provinces, Ophir is a kingdom that has real and substantial choices that lie before it. If you want a challenge, give Ophir a try.

Ophir borders some really powerful kingdoms, for good or for ill. They make for both great enemies and great allies, depending upon how you wield the sword of player-to-player diplomacy.

Ophir is no small potatoes of a kingdom. It's not the biggest dog in the pack, but even still, Ophir runs with the big dogs. It's a kingdom with real meat on its bones.

If you're not careful and on your toes, Ophir can get chewed up and gobbled down. If you prefer a soft position, then Ophir won't likely suit you worth a damn.

Ophirian wizard, Redmin Zarus, is one of the most feared starting characters in the game. He's got a SUPERIOR rating in magic ability, and that Fire Wall spell of his packs one hell of wallop. *He can definitely light your enemy's ass right up!*

HYBORIAN WAR is owned and operated by Reality Simulations, Inc..

Contact RSI: CSR@REALITY.COM

* All Hyborian War content and images copyright © Reality Simulations, Inc.



Which kingdom will you rule?



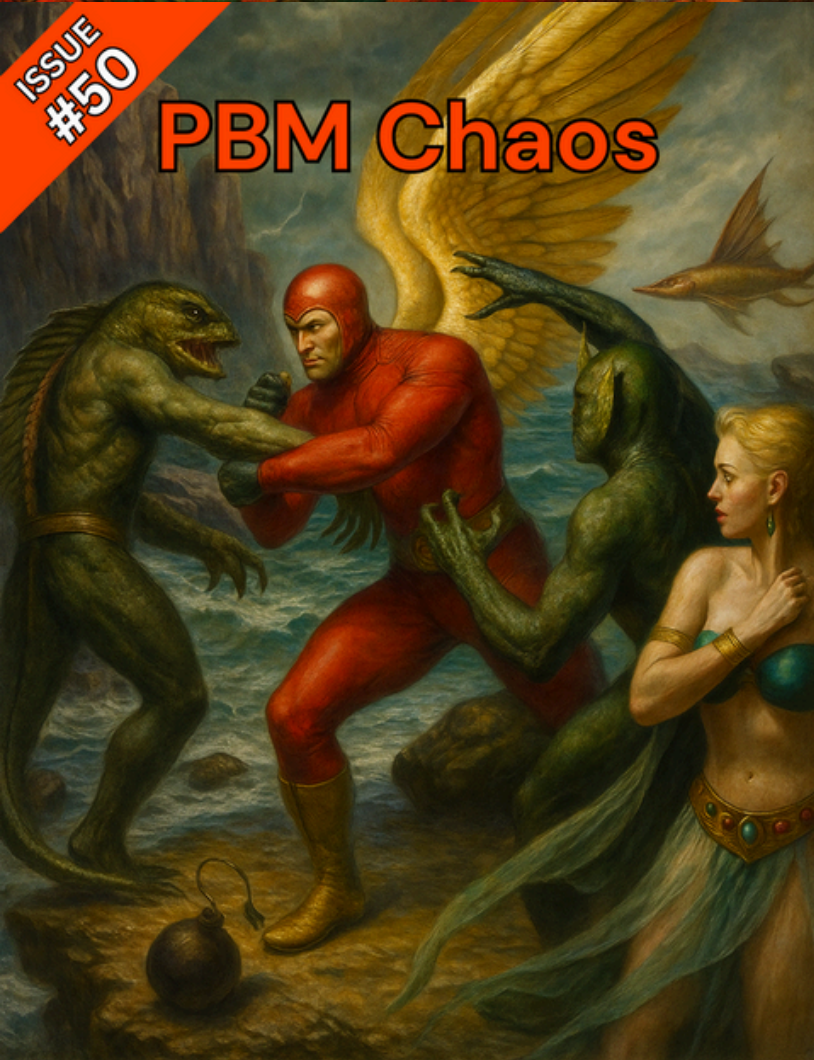
HYBORIAN™ WAR



HYBORIAN WAR is owned and operated by Reality Simulations, Inc.
©1985 Reality Simulations, Inc.

1985 Conan Properties, Inc. All rights reserved.
Game design ©1985 Reality Simulations, Inc.

www.reality.com





Lead the PBM charge!