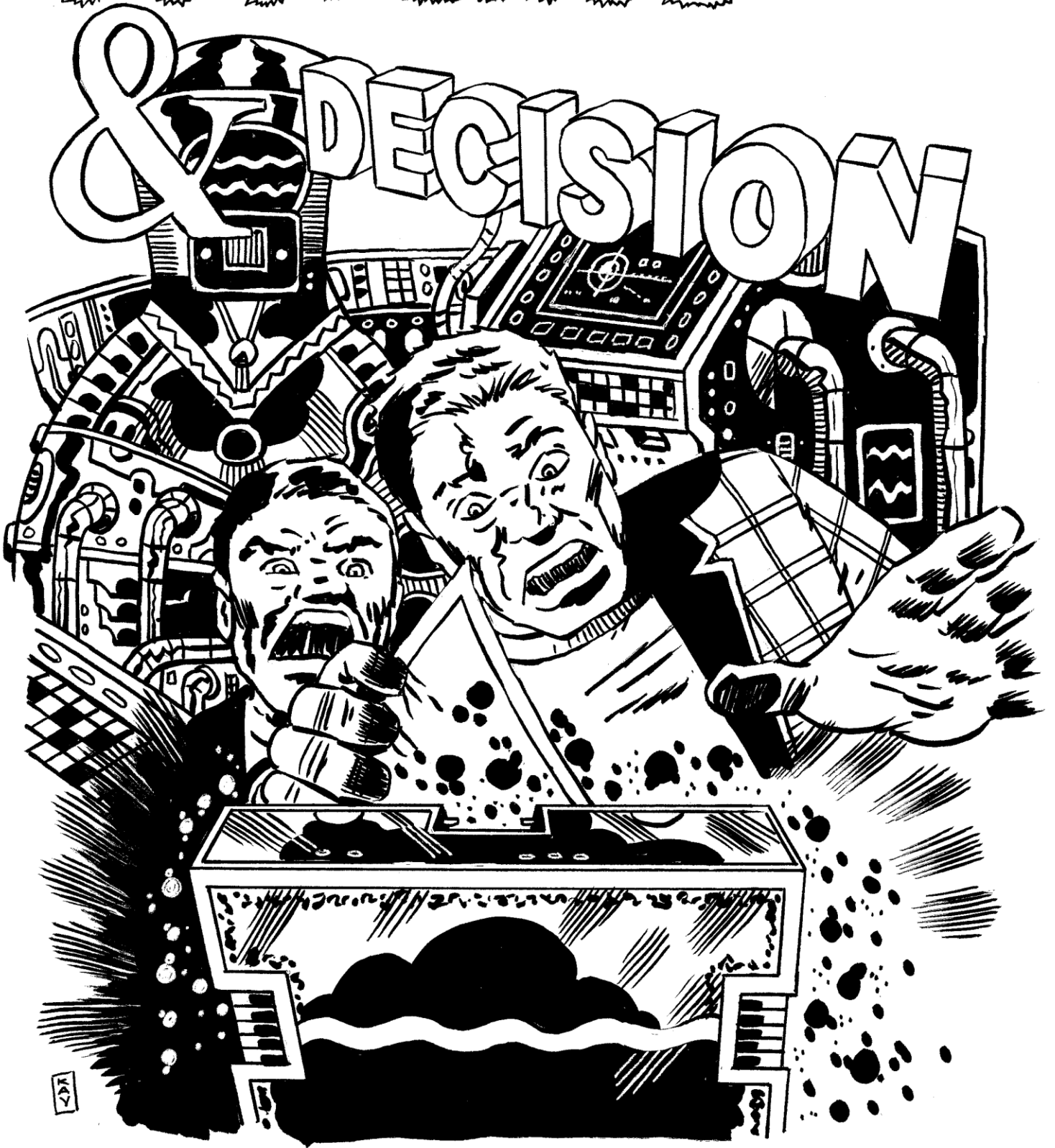


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Chronicles of the Mad Scientist

by Mark Wardell

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Okay, it's issue 1, and somehow I found my way onto page 1. We'll ignore the fact that I'm doing layout and got to decide the order of each article. Seriously, I was aiming for the back page, but I was bumped up front.

Now that I'm here, what to say, what to say.

Where were you when the latest PBM magazine was first published? Will issue 1 become a collector's item? Doubtful as it's an electronic publication and an unlimited number of copies are possible even long after the Grim one and I have moved on. And isn't that a change from the days gone by.

What hasn't changed is the simple fact that an endeavour like this can only move forward with the support of the community it serves. In the future I will stray onto thinner ice with this column, but for today I would simply like to thank everyone who contributed to making issue 1 of S&D a reality.

To everyone who took the time to string a few words together to form an article or an ad I truly appreciate your effort. Please accept my apology should in the process of doing the layout some part of your submission may have been ever so slightly mangled.

For those among you who held back, the deadline for issue 2 is less than a month away on December 20th to be followed promptly by issue 3, and 4, and 5, etc. This is not a one-off to be done and forgotten, this is just the begging of a long term endeavour that will grow and continue to develop its own unique character. Those who have gone before you can testify it's a mostly painless process. We're looking for game reviews,

Welcome to Suspense & Decision Premier Issue!

The deadline for submissions for
issue #2 is **December 20th, 2013**

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long or short, preferably from a player rather than the moderator, artwork, ads, really anything related in some way to PBM gaming, or "Turn Based Gaming" for the PC crowd.

While inspired by those publications who blazed the trail before us, Paper Mayhem, Flagship, and The PBM Report among others, S&D is and will support the PBM hobby of today.

What is it you want to see in these pages in the coming issues? Join with us, because if you don't care enough to put it here, nobody will. We will honor the past history of PBM gaming, while looking forward to its future.

And that I believe will make Issue 1 of Suspense & Decision a collector's item in the history of PBM Gaming.

~ Mark Wardell

Mad Scientist, Suspense & Decision Magazine

Nowhere But PBM

by Rick McDowell

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Where else can you compete against a dozen or more mature, intelligent adults in a sophisticated, thinking man's game set in a genre of mutual interest? In a format that lets you play whenever you wish within a cycle of several days, and affords that same convenience to all allies and enemies in the campaign? Where else do games build to a crescendo over several months of thoughtful planning and execution, where lifelong friendships may be made, some of whom may also frequently play the role of arch nemesis? Where reflexes matter for naught, strategy is everything, both in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your position and style of play, as well as those of your fellow competitors?

Nowhere other than here: PBM/PBEM. While there are thousands of computer, online, and well-presented board games, no other style offers all the advantages of PBEM. So why is the hobby waning instead of waxing?

Ironically, for some of the same reasons it stands alone as a most appealing combination of attractive game play elements, it is neigh unapproachable to the huddled masses hooked on instant gratification, splashy graphics, download-and-start-clicking, and a torrent of low brow free online games.

PBEM games and their purveyors are high-end boutique in comparison - for very discriminating buyers who generally know what they want and what they're getting into:

- Complexity, which they appreciate rather than cringe from and which by their nature means lots of rules to absorb and enjoy before doing anything in the game;
- Anticipation replaces instant gratification. This is a hallmark of PBEM but a foreign idea to most gamers, especially younger ones;
- The boutique (low volume, high cost and high customer loyalty) requirement of producing PBEM is met by the uninitiated as priced too highly. Probably all PBEM moderators have heard something like, "I can play World of

Warcraft unlimited for \$13 a month. Why would I pay your price?"

All gamers that haven't should try World of Warcraft (WoW) or something similar to see what it's about. After all, it has tens of millions of mostly teenaged players. If after a few hours of play or a few leveling ups, you don't find WoW tedious and numbingly repetitive, haven't seen there is little substance behind the flashy graphic veneer, don't mind a game dominated by 16 year olds who aren't thinking five minutes ahead, and/or your monthly entertainment budget is about that of a movie and a box of popcorn, you should stay with WoW and its ilk.

If you want something more stimulating for your brain than for your eyes, come back to PBEM and bring your friends. Players in good PBEM's think about their game even more of their time away from the game than while actually playing it. They are evaluating the situation, considering alternatives, calculating the implications of every move, inventing the next steps in various diplomatic overtures and the potential consequences of each. It is absorbing, thought provoking, challenging, fraught with peril for miscalculation and great intrinsic reward for plans well-conceived and executed. Of course, there is also that underrated aspect of going against (and with) very bright fellow competitors of living tissue instead of AI. And each campaign is very different than the one before, bringing fresh challenges.

PBEM will always be boutique; it will never attract a million followers. But it can survive and encourage its bright designers to create new worlds that entertain us for years to come. Here are some obstacles to overcome:

- Marketing is not very effective because a single company has a very limited budget and is trying to compete online with the marketing dollars of gaming companies with millions to spend.
- The perception that PBEM is too expensive.
- The learning curve to come to love the game is normally substantial.
- The demographic is aging and not necessarily the most technically savvy.

- The lack of glitz and instant gratification.
- We need exciting new concepts for games and worlds.

To those obstacles, I suggest the following be considered:

- PBEM companies should consider forming a consortium for marketing and awareness and sharing player lists to build a unified community of gamers.
- PBEM *is* expensive, although many boxed games are expensive as well. So are high quality products in any field. The value proposition must be emphasized, meaning the hours of enjoyment per dollar and the uniqueness of the experience for each player, rather than having the same experience a million others might have identically in most online and computer games.
- This is a delineator for sure. A casual gamer (plays free games) is unlikely to become an avid PBEM gamer, because it is too complicated. We need to find those gamers who enjoy the challenge and mental stimulation, and they are less likely to be actively looking for challenging games than are kids looking for the newest release.
- This is much a marketing problem: we are trying to reach the people who would really enjoy the hobby but just don't know about it or think immediately that they would enjoy it, and they aren't looking for it.
- Producers can make largely text results more attractive, but this is another hard line between eye candy gratification and mental stimulation and anticipation. It seems avid readers of both fiction and non-fiction are the best target demographic, rather than existing gamers.
- A breakthrough design in a totally new genre or an existing genre presented completely differently with lots of hooks could be big for the whole field by bringing new attention.

Word of mouth remains probably the most important marketing tool and way to convey what our hobby has to offer those who would seek mental stimulation in their entertainment. Players, tell your intellectual friends about your favorite PBEM game and join your favorite game with them to help them learn the ropes and become a happy member of our wonderful PBEM community.

Rick McDowell

Designer and Producer for Alamaze, Fall of Rome, and Kingdoms of Arcania

Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire – Here and Now

by Mica Goldstone

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Phoenix is an open ended space opera set in a persistent universe that combines elements of strategy, role-play, resource management and politics. It has been continuously run for the past 21 years and developed during this entire period. As it has evolved it has shed its pbm status, though still retains the turn-based structure, now firmly entrenched in its custom online interface.

For a game with the longevity of Phoenix, talking about it can be akin to that of parent chatting about their child. Indeed, as the game is open-ended, events, much like those of youth can never be repeated. It is about as far from a typical online, console or board game as it is possible to get while still retaining many of the essential qualities of all. I suppose it could be argued that it is more like a roleplaying game, but then even adventures can be done-over. In the case of Phoenix, it is always onwards into the future and never quite certain what's in store. I would say that at a fundamental level there are two games to Phoenix. There are the over-arching plots that involve the direction of empires and game master controlled interests and also that of the individual player. For many people the two rarely cross as they have a very limited scope of what is taking part at both a political level and at the other edge of the game universe. To a greater degree this is one of the strengths of the game as it allows players to simply play the game, observing the things that don't affect them in the same way that we read the news, curious as to what is

happening elsewhere, but generally satisfied that ultimately it is not bugging about with our own personal plans. I think some game designers overlook this profound perspective, forcing everybody to band together or be constantly battling and jumping through hoops. Many would rather be in control at a much more sedate pace but also knowing that should they desire it, they can kick it up a notch.

I use as an example a new region of space in Phoenix that has been developed this year. Coreward representing over 20 star systems and more than 500 celestial bodies has become the most cosmopolitan region of space in the game. Unlike previously added territory it is sufficiently far enough away from established nations that the 'need' to annex it for security reasons irrespective of the cost to players' time and budget has not been an issue. As a consequence, while there are skirmishes and the occasional grumble over localized development, most of the players involved have had an unprecedented level of self-governance. With an understanding that what is currently public knowledge is only the hub of the star cluster, there is satisfaction that this will still be true for the foreseeable future.

It is all very nice telling people who are not playing the game where they can go to get away from the action but without a back drop of what is happening it is meaningless. So, here is a brief news update on the big events.

Humanity is by far the widest reaching species within the known galaxy but is also highly factionalized. The enduring peace between the two primary competing power blocs, the Stellar Empire and the Detinus Republic collapsed a couple of years ago. Currently there are short periods of intense hostility between longer intervals of skirmishing. Players involved in this part of the game can be involved in all levels of diplomacy, combat and subterfuge. Most however are content to leave it to the few warmongers while they deal with their own private affairs. When all is said and done new star systems are being discovered from time to time and these need exploring.

Amongst the various alien species, the collapse of peace amongst the human factions has finally given them opportunities to pursue

their own interests without the threat of unified retaliation by humanity. For some this has given them the chance to rebuilt having suffered at the hands of various human factions over the years while others are showing much greater ambitions. Even now some are claiming that human dominance will be driven from one of the star clusters. As to the fate of the millions of humans inevitably abandoned – who knows?

The Dewiek Elder Nation – mistakenly compared with terran wolves or some other vicious canine having largely usurped their ancient holds and star systems are now seeking to expand their territory. This has brought them up close and personal with factions within the Stellar Empire. These they have bloodied, taking advantage of their ongoing conflict with the Republic.

Sentient insect hive minds that form the Hexamon have also been on the increase, multiplying in the dark corners of the galaxy and becoming something of a plague to frontier humanity.

If the prospect of being eaten alive by giant insects is the stuff of nightmares for many human colonists beyond the reach of the Stellar Empire, the threat of enslavement by the most debased aliens ever to have existed is all too real. The Flagritz are genetically predisposed to treating all other sentient species are little more than consumables to be used then disposed of as needed.

As an outsider and having read this far you are probably wondering how you can get involved. Well, it's easy. First of all sign up to play and run through the missions. While doing the missions is not strictly necessary, Phoenix has a very steep learning curve and the missions are designed to introduce you the mechanics of generating orders and interpreting the results. Using the forums to introduce yourself and getting to know the players in established affiliations is invaluable. You will find the players a welcoming bunch.

The online interface (called Nexus) has private forums and libraries for each faction in the game. As a consequence, it is analogous to an ocean in so far as most of the action is below the surface.

There are 233 forums of which only 12 are visible to new players!

The other thing to expect is mistakes. Even veterans are capable of running entire fleets of ships through dense asteroid belts after first overriding all navigational hazard alarms. We have designed the early stage of playing the game to give you a few ships so that you can quickly follow divergent paths and learning as much as possible in a short time.

I will say this for Phoenix, if you want to accumulate assets it is very easy. The real challenge is to know when you have enough.

Finally, Phoenix is a slow burn game. Plans can last weeks, often months and even years in some cases. It's not about finishing the game; the end game is about getting what you want from it. For some this is about fighting naval battles for others it is accumulating wealth or owning star systems while others it is exploring new worlds. Signing up and running starships are free, so if what you have read sounds interesting, give it a go.

To Boldly Go, Now in Public Beta

by Chris Babcock
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To Boldly Go, affectionately called TBG by its players, is a science fiction themed play by web game originally created by Jeremy Maiden, who is also known for several Diplomacy variants and who played in Olympia G1. In a genre dominated by fantasy games and complex unit types, TBG offers a unique single viewpoint playing experience. The original play test boasted 2300 turns over the course of 15 years and was only ended due to a natural disaster. Created specifically to address some of the shortcomings Jeremy perceived in the PBM/PbeM games of the time, TBG attempts to offer many of the social dynamics of Diplomacy in an open ended game. You'll have to play for yourself to see whether the game delivers on its promised social dynamics, but there can be no doubt as to its playability as an open ended game. Now under its third maintainer, TBG promises to enter a new stage in its development.

Originally offered free, "with all the support that implies," TBG is now features the professional grade support of Chris Babcock of ASCII King Games – <http://usak.asciiking.com/about.html>. ASCII King Games offers Diplomacy, Machiavelli and now TBG "Free and ad-free, supported by the freewill donations of the players." This means 24 hour turn around on support requests on a free game, with no advertising and no "freemiums." Unlike free games where players and moderators alike place a low value on the game due to its cost, the value of TBG is quantified and players are given the opportunity to contribute without gaining any in-game advantage. This dependence on freewill, or goodwill, donations creates a sense of value often lacking in free games without turning any player away by requiring a credit card to join.

The current game, available at <http://tbg.asciiking.com>, is about halfway through a 100 turn public beta at the time of this writing. New players are encouraged to join and gain a feel for the game in preparation for the roll-out of a stable game. More than just a shakeout run of an established server application, the beta test features the update of the venerable HTML of the original program to modern HTML5 and the addition of many auxiliary features not available during the game's creation.

The production game is scheduled to begin in the second quarter of 2014.

Company Commander

by Jason Oates
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At any time in the last 50 years there has been a conflict or civil war raging in one part of the world or another. Most of these conflicts fail to reach the evening news and are fought with "Last Generation" weapons and without the overt or intentional intervention of the Super Powers.

These wars are fought at a low level, often with battles between forces numbering less than one hundred men, usually for some vital objective connected to wealth generation or influence over the population. Often the infrastructure of the country is badly damaged in the process and the

war leads to poverty, starvation and mass refugees.

It is at this point that players enter Company Commander.

The aim of the appointment to that exultant rank is to gather the meagre forces at your disposal and bring stability and prosperity to the area under your control.

Those meagre forces are Infantry squads (of varying armament, training and capability) Support units such as Medics, Command Post, Mechanics, Combat Engineers & Pioneers.

Two levels of officer are included and it is a blend of fighting units, support units and command units that is necessary to form an effective fighting force.

Weapons like missiles, aircraft, guns, helicopters and armour are available from arms dealers who will set the price and availability each month. There are 75 different weapons systems you may deploy.

In war, logistics are vital and the game uses a simple "Combat Supply" System. Combat supplies are purchased and delivered to your main base and need to be present with your forces when fighting.

All armies of the last 100 years have needed to get their forces to the battle and the game is no different. There are two truck types that are the heavy movers with other vehicles for different tasks.

War is an expensive business and without the sponsorship of the large Democracies or Dictatorships you will need hard cash to buy weapons and train your forces. To get that money you must sell local resources on the open market. Those trucks carrying men and munitions to the front line can be loaded with natural resources for the return journey to your base ready to sell.

In summary Company Commander simulates low level warfare in the 21st tactical, logistic and economics elements. It is a mixed moderated game that can be played by email or traditional mail.

Story 1-914: The Jungle Clans

by From: Peter Rzechorzek

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From a rock outcrop on the big hill, Chun-gah watched his camp in the jungle. Pandemonium. Where the vegetation had been cleared he could see all sorts of people milling around, engaged in all sorts of who-knows-what. Brightly outfitted Aisharians and short, bow-legged Forsung mixed freely with the Kung Sah, all eager to get something from each other that they have never had before. Never mind that they knew not what it was. At least the Forsung knew what they were about, but he had heard that compared with his own people, they were lousy gamblers. He feared that soon some Forsung warrior would get sick of being cheated and draw his sword. So far that hadn't happened. The Aisharians were drawing the most attention and were freely mixing with his people. They stood out like a tree on a prairie hill that was for sure. Where the Kung Sah were the color of the steppe, the Aisharians were whatever color struck their fancy. Leathers in red and white, and the color of a fruit he had seen in this jungle that the Kung Sah had no word for. And cloth. Common Aisharians would be dressed in colors that glowed compared with his best ceremonial dress. Kung Sah women were not normally taken by the frivolous or the useless, but the Aisharians had awoken something in them. He saw a Kung Sah woman in a bright Aisharian shirt and hoped in his heart that she didn't cheat someone out of it in a game.

They had seemed aloof and a bit arrogant when they first entered the Kung Sah camp, but that broke down very quickly. It was simply their version of the Kung Sah "Suspicious Eye." Lack of a common language proved no barrier to trade between their peoples. Aisharian cooking implements became a hot item, and in return Aisharian boys were whooping it up, learning to ride horses from the skillful Kung Sah warriors. Recipes were exchanged and young men and women looked each other over hungrily.

"Quite a mess, isn't it?"

Chun-gah just about spat his heart out and almost fell off the rock as he wheeled around.

"Damn your ancient hide, Yagadai! How do you expect to stay old when you sneak up on people like that?"

Yagadai sat down on the rock with a sigh. "My old bones make too much noise to sneak. You were daydreaming."

"Daydreaming, my butt!" Chun-gah moved over beside his friend, and they both regarded the mob swirling below them. "I've never seen so many people in my life."

"It's been a trial for my clan. You remember Xan Kan Su, do you not?"

"Yes. She's been a midwife for Chieu Hoi. Short little thing."

"Well, that short little thing almost started a small war. Seems some Aisharian woman was in a hurry and didn't think little Xu was a real obstacle. Hell, the foreigner was almost twice as tall as Xu, so she might not have even seen her. Anyway, she shoved Xu aside with enough force to push her face down in the mud."

Chun-gah looked at his friend with a stricken expression. "Oh, no."

"Oh, yes. By the time it was broken up, Xu was doing her level best to flatten the foreigner's skull with a leg bone. Damn near did it too. She's hurt, real bad, but she'll live. Apparently they've got good medicine women there. I was lucky, there were lots of witnesses of both sides and they all agreed that Xu was provoked. I don't think the foreign woman was very popular with anyone. Anyway, I didn't have to do anything about it, but Xu was so mad I thought she'd just swell up and burst."

"I swear, Xu kept the temper of every demon she's ever slain."

"Kept? She's been a war waiting to break out ever since I've known her. And I've known her all my life."

"And you're older than dirt."

Yagadai laughed and slapped Chun-gah's shoulder. "I sure feel it today."

In a hurt some distance from the hill, Xubachu sat cross-legged by their small cooking fire. He stared at the fire in silence, his

moustache drooping limply around his mouth. A stout, middle-aged woman sat beside him, looking at him with moist eyes. She reached out a stubby arm and rested her small hand on the man's arm. "Why you?"

The man shook his head silently. He raised his eyes to meet those of his wife, but could not hold them. He returned to the fire. "The task is a big one. We will go very far."

"Yes, it is, my husband. I know we have seen many years. I know I will give you children no more, but my husband..." she stopped. The sounds of revelry carried on outside the yurt but could not penetrate the wall of emotion that surrounded the two. Xubachu raised his eyes to his wife's again and gathered her graying hair in his hand. He squeezed the back of her neck lovingly. "You have many to care for you if I am gone." He cupped her ear and she pressed her cheek into his palm. "You will not be alone."

"If you go I will always be alone." Her gruffness gone. He winced as he saw her naked love for him. She had always been such a strong woman, and now he beheld a terrified little girl.

"You will protect me at night? You will guard me from the shadows?"

She smiled. He saw years melt away from her lined face. "Yes, my husband. No demon will touch your soul."

Xubachu traced his thumb against her cheek. "Will you protect me from the demons of the great water when I find it?"

"I will fight the water demons 'till my last breath."

"Then I will be safe." He smiled back at her. "I will not fear the dark. And in the light it is I who is feared."

"I will make you an amulet tonight, my husband. I will join my sisters under the full moon tonight, and when we are done I will make you an amulet. All our power will be in that amulet. The demons will quake at your passing." Her eyes began to glow as she gratefully grasped the task. "We will celebrate the coming spring and together we touch even the creator. I will use this power."

“That is good.” He drew her close to him. “Now, let’s think of better things than my journey.” His nose touched hers as he smiled into her eyes. “Let’s remember our youth.”

Children ran and shouted, and people went about their noisy lives, while inside the yurt the years melted like snow beneath the sun.

Ancient Empires

by Jason Oates

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Ancient Empires is set at the dawn of time.

You are the leader of a settlement. It has a basic craft economy and a village with a number of mud huts populated by a few men and their families. You have a few hundred loyal men under arms sworn to do your bidding. You will also have some villages in the area loyal to your flag.

Your fledgling Empire will not be alone and there are sure to be ambitious leaders nearby who will readily take what is yours if they have a chance.

While you have a few units in your army you will need to increase your military strength but the choice is stark, Ploughshares or Swords as men taken into arms will not be available for hunting or crafts so a balance needs to be struck.

With variable weather you need to make sure that you have food stocks to make it through to spring. Starving population is not good for you.

Building a larger village is not enough to increase population. You must make it attractive with plentiful food and low taxes to ensure that settlers come to live in your village. They will be keen to find employment and you can appoint new hunters, fishermen and craftsmen then start to build a proper infrastructure by creating schools, market places, provision stores and an Infirmary.

Once you have something worth taking it might be a good idea to fortify and garrison your locations.

Armies are made up of 100 men units starting with basic infantry, mounted and missile troops, but with research you can improve weapons, armour and tactics for these units as time passes.

Eventually new levels of technology will be reached with more effective military units and more productive civil facilities. The technology race has begun and successful empires will rule supreme.

Each month the local market will offer goods for you to purchase and you may sell goods to them.

Ancient Empires is a mixed moderated simulation of Ancient life and war.

TribeNet FAQS

INTRODUCTION

TribeNet is a turn based PBEM that has been running since 1997. It is an open-ended game of diplomacy, negotiation, build, trade and war. The central elements of TribeNet are strategic thinking and positioning, tactical planning, political alliance and military and economic development. You control the fate and fortune of a Neolithic Clan of Nomads as they carve out an Empire or struggle for survival. As you read on please bear in mind that nothing substitutes for a few turns of play in the cauldron of human motivations and interests.

QUESTION

Is TribeNet a War Game, if not, what sort of game is it like?

RESPONSE

If you have played Civilisation, Age of Empires or Diplomacy you will get something of the idea of TribeNet by combining some of the central elements of these games. But TribeNet is neither a pure build game, nor is it a war game, it is somewhere between. By straddling the line between building and war gaming, TribeNet allows a range of choices about what to do with one’s Tribe and how to approach the game (and other players) that are not available in either straight building games or straight war games. Straight war games have the war going on when you start, which means that the reasons for the war are someone else’s. TribeNet contains a number of highly prized hexes that are useful to control – you can do this through military

presence and/or political alliance – the course you choose is, well, your choice.

QUESTION

What is the basic idea?

RESPONSE

TribeNet is a PBEM game in which players control a Clan of people (which at start-up is a single undivided entity). The Clan advances by developing skills each turn and by gathering resources that can be used to make weapons, armour etc and other goods useful and crucial for survival.

Clans are located on a hex (agon)-grid map aligned north-south. Thus directions are indicated by N, S, NE, NW, SE and SW. Your clan can move around the map by giving directional instructions during the movement turn.

Each turn you will receive a personal report on your results and a newsletter called Tribe News.

Please note that although turns are database processed the game is NOT computer moderated.

Overseeing all this is the GameMaster. The GM is something like an umpire and world creator.

QUESTION

How many players are there in the game and where do they come from?

RESPONSE

At this stage there are 30 players (the previous game had 100+). The majority are from the US, UK and Australia but there have also been Canadian, German, Italian and New Zealand players.

QUESTION

How complex are the rules?

RESPONSE

There is a reasonable degree of detail and quite a lot of it. Some people like this, some don't. But the rules are written in plain English, with no need to understand or run code and so

on. Further, you don't have to learn all the rules at once – you need to understand about 10% of them to make an effective start.

The first few turns require following a few fundamental principles common to most build/strategy games. Feed your people, produce a few basic goods and scout the terrain. In fact, if you read through all the rules before starting, your first turn would probably look little different to the example provided. I doubt that anyone has read all the rules before starting, and most that start seem to survive.

There is also a Mentor system available so that an experienced player can walk you through the first couple of turns – if you come into the game without knowing anyone the use of a Mentor is recommended.

As your clan gains more abilities and resources you can start to familiarize yourself with the extra rules, taking advantage of an increasing range of options. You will broaden the range of goods you can produce and then engage in the development of Politics, Research, Economics and culture on a much grander scale. And then there are the negotiations with other players over resources, treaties, military and political alliances, trade and doctrine. Where TribeNet makes its greatest deviation from the average "civilization" game is that the player determines the developmental direction of their Clan. This is done via research. For example, you may develop a new weapon, new buildings, new animals, new farm crops, specialist troops, new ships, etc. When you reach this stage you will find that you have already grasped 90% of the rules.

QUESTION

Has this game got an ultimate goal? In Civilization, for example, the ultimate goal is military victory or space colonization.

RESPONSE

You can achieve one of two goals. First, to survive for two game years. Second, to build a Pelagoria (see Rules)

QUESTION

With so many Clans well established what are the chances of a new player winning or indeed, surviving?

RESPONSE

The idea of "winning" is not really appropriate to TribeNet. It is an open-ended game that is more involved with the process rather than the outcome. However, this does not mean that individual Clans do not get eliminated - which I guess gets to the heart of the matter.

In order to avoid a newer Clan being trampled by an older one the new players are placed (by the GM) on parts of the continent quite distant from the first positions (of course this does not guarantee that an old hand will not make the journey, but this has not yet happened in seven real years of play in the older version). Another thing to add here is that new continents have been developed that will enable newer Clans to remain isolated from the "establishment" until they feel they are ready for interaction with the older groups.

But simply being established does not mean that a Clan has it easy - in fact, it is often just the opposite as the main feuds historically seem to be between the older rivals - with the newer players largely ignored in these conflicts. If you are familiar with games like Diplomacy you will know that being (perceived to be) a leader simply draws attention to yourself, and often brings the weight of co-operative action against you.

On the other hand, the older established blocs are always on the lookout for new recruits - so if you want some immediate action you can join one of these, take advantage of their information etc, but also bring heat upon yourself from their enemies.

In my experience the time at which a player joins does not seem to unduly effect their enjoyment of the game.

A couple of other points might be relevant here. Firstly, you will start near other newish players who will be in the same boat as you. Secondly, there is a period of 12 turns during which new players may not be attacked, so even if you make some "poor" decisions the early

consequences may not be all that disastrous. Thirdly, new players are carefully positioned so as not to be exposed to the "excesses" of the longer-term establishment.

QUESTION

How easy is it to survive if you "go it alone"? In Diplomacy this is fatal but in other games it may just be possible to survive - where does this game come in to it?

RESPONSE

Much of the interest in the game comes in planning with other players - planning economic, military strategies etc. However, ultimately there are a variety of strategies available in this respect. But the game is much more interesting if you actually talk with someone and form alliances and joint plans.

QUESTION

So if I do not want to go it alone how do I find allies?

RESPONSE

Ghengis Khan did not spring fully formed from the breast of Mongolia. He had to spend a while developing the coalition that turned into the Mongol hordes. And you will too. But unlike so many other games, TribeNet requires you to do the actual work. One of the most important lessons of TribeNet is that isolation breeds nothing. An isolated Clan can remain safe and secure, but with that safety and security it also makes the Clan moribund. The Clan can grow in power, and develop huge potential, but that is exactly where it will remain. TribeNet is not for the player who expects to be entertained by others. The player must establish relations of some sort with other Clans.

The first opening for this is the early service provided by the GM of "Know thy Neighbor". If he is asked, one time he will tell you whom your neighbors are. You won't know which direction they lay. You won't know how far. But you will know that they are the closest Clans to you. A door is rarely opened for someone who will not knock.

You want to conquer the world? You must create your coalition by careful diplomacy. You

must establish a relationship with your neighbors, finding out who is gregarious and who is not, and through them establish a network of friends among the other Clans. TribeNet is the ultimate limited intelligence game, and you will know little unless you are talking to players. You will find many players willing to talk to you too because they suffer from the same lack of solid intelligence information that you do. This single act is the most important and largest step taken on the road of success in TribeNet.

On the geographical front you are limited in your knowledge of terrain – until you either do your own mapping or negotiate to trade maps with other players. On the political front you are limited in your knowledge of the positions, attitudes and affiliations of other Clans. However, to fill in the political and geographical gaps you are able to interact freely with the rest of the players through email. This is diplomacy in its purest form. The power that you can project can be real or illusory. Player interaction is the hallmark of TribeNet.

During the course of this effort you will also find out who can be your friends and who are likely to be your enemies. Your first goal is to establish an alliance or solid working relationship with at least one other Clan. For both offense and defense, Clans do better with company. This can mean pulling up stakes and moving to another location to be with a second Clan, or inviting another Clan to move over to where you are. The more the merrier. As the Clan's leader, you decide your friends and enemies. An alliance with the better-equipped and more powerful Clans allows you to become more powerful; gaining more wealth and resources than you will on your own. But with alliances comes caution, most Clans are looking for Slaves. Will your people be the next supply? And remember, too much power also creates wary neighbours! Maintain your allies, but maintain your army also. Military might has a way of talking a language understood by all.

QUESTION

Do you have any idea how much time it takes for a player to do his or her orders?

RESPONSE

The Orders for a basic clan can be very quick - between 10-20 minutes. As you increase the complexity (you are not obliged to do this, but the majority of players do), the time increases as well - but the most complex of clans should take no more than 1 - 1.5 hours per turn (two weeks). Some players spend a lot of time on Diplomacy/Politics between turns and it is difficult to put an exact figure on what you will be up for here. The obvious point is that there is no fixed time during the week that you need to set aside - and this flexibility means that in one sense time is not really an issue. But if you become engaged in the game and develop your position, your Orders take longer to construct and the diplomacy gets more complex. In this game diplomacy/negotiation is not essential - but most players can't help themselves (propaganda is also big). How much time you spend at this is entirely up to you.

QUESTION

Is TribeNet Web Based?

RESPONSE

No – it is not a real time game (or Web game) but rather a turn based game conducted via email (no postal mail accepted). The general philosophy is that your chance of success does not depend on how often, when, nor for how long you can log-on. There is a lot of diplomatic and political discussion mid turn, but this can be conducted at your leisure and is not “hot seat” driven. As a consequence, there is not a great deal in terms of graphical interface, relying largely on that old-fashioned idea “imagination”! In addition, there is much fuller documentation than found in many Web Based games.

QUESTION

How is the turn Report sent? What about Orders?

RESPONSE

Orders are in MS Word2000, Word6 or Word97. Excel is also acceptable. Reports are sent in Word6.

QUESTION

How long has TribeNet been around? I ask because I am sick of enlisting in promising games that fold when the GM finds a “real” job.

RESPONSE

TribeNet itself has been running since 1997. It grew out of a game called Tribe Vibes, which started in 1987 so the TribeNet genre goes back over 20 years which places it as a seminal contributor to games of this genre. I should also add that GMing is my job - which I have been doing for 17 years.

QUESTION

Do I need to download special software?

RESPONSE

No. All you need is some hexagonal mapping paper.



Empires at War 1805

Dear Gamer,

Do you remember your first board-game? Did you spend the whole night to read the rule booklet? What about next day's rush to gather your friends!?

And the first time you rolled a die? Gee, I wish I was luckier! I'm sure the excitement is still the same every time you lay your “fate” at the hands of lady Luck!

Do you recall the confidence when you first shouted “check-mate”? What a marvelous strategic game chess is! I always wished for more pawns, more knights and more opposing queens either to beat or plea for help!

Some moments of our life; some unforgettable milestones of our gaming experience!

Dear NON-Gamer,

Do you feel curious about the previously mentioned experiences? Are you wondering whether or not the feeling is still strong?

Well, lucky all! Oplon Games made the surprise, offering us a unique war-game made straight from the magic dust of our imagination.

Empires at War is a strategy game that replicates in a fascinating way the historical period of the 1800s. Various scenarios cover the period from the French Revolutionary Wars, to the battle of the 3 Empires at Austerlitz, and furthermore, combining politics, economy and of course strategy from the top to the lowest tactical level.

It offers full control of one out of 17 historical states as appeared that time in Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea. The player is completely responsible for political interaction

with the rest of the 16 players, having options like forming and breaking alliances, declaring war and issuing for peace. At

the same time, an in-game communication platform enables direct interaction between players, enriching the political agenda with trust building, information exchange, intrigue, treachery, backstabbing and all those “sophisticated” manners that people develop when fighting each other. After all, “*War is the continuation of politics by other means*” (Carl von Clausewitz).

Players have to raise and maintain armies and fleets that will ensure the implementation of agreed and well scheduled plans. Sooner or later a campaign will be on the verge, either defending motherland or fighting for “vital” space. But “*The*





sinews of war are infinite money" (Marcus Tullius Cicero), therefore before muskets shoot and ships set sails, the development of a sustainable economy is more than necessary.

From the never-ending Ukrainian steppes till the deepest mines in Africa; from humble wheat and wool till rare diamonds and expensive gold, 12 different commercial goods are available to be exploited in 3 different Continents. A well balanced trading system based on overall supply and demand guarantees that trade is indeed worth fighting for!

Each state has its own military tradition, and this applies to its recruiting pool. A large amount of different military units are ready to offer their services, forming numerous armies and mighty fleets. From the French Old Guard to the ferocious Russian Cossacks and the fearless Egyptian Mameluks, every single unit has its own attributes and adds significant characteristics to the whole army.

In the field of the battle the fate of two **or more** armies are absolutely at the hands of their leaders. Like pawns in a huge chess-board, Battalions, Regiments, Brigades and Generals are absolutely at the hands of their commanders. They will follow orders, aim targets and move in paths that lead to glory or to annihilation.

The field Battle is the quintessence of EaW. Literally a game-in-game, with its own rules and philosophy, offers players a unique opportunity to claim wins based more on tactics and mind rather than luck and algorithms. And in contrary with all respected Bonaparte, in the Field Battle, ranks, experience and unit characteristics do make the difference! *"When soldiers have been baptized in the fire of a battle-field, they have all one rank in my eyes"* (Napoleon Bonaparte).

Without fancy graphs and peculiar animation, EaW is created to reveal "beautiful minds" rather than beautiful images. Like any other strategy game it creates a competitive environment, where player cooperation and interaction is greatly needed; but its structure and its mechanics restrict the abuse of power to the minimum. The

feeling is more like playing with friends rather than fighting against numerous unknown strangers who stay sleepless waiting the perfect time to launch attacks at your "villages". It is a turn - based game which offers the necessary time to plan, discuss, communicate, deepen into its culture, and finally take the best decision without the haste of an online real-time competition. In any case EaW is indeed a cultured game; historical background, well known personalities, actual existing countries and armies are offering the game the necessary status to be included amongst "toys for big boys".

Of course all interested have to face a significant amount of complexity, not much in user interface and rules understanding, but to assimilate and apply all the given information to their game play. Decisions like what unit to raise and how much of it; when to do so; declare war or stay allied, support a weak state against a Major Power or facilitate its plans; plan large scale campaigns taking into consideration the season and the distance you have to establish a supply line; sell or buy goods; build production sites or increase population; impose high taxation or offer colonial goods to your people; such dilemmas are only some of what you are expected to do!

As an epilogue, I'd like to add that I really love the feeling and the atmosphere of that historical period. I also like the interaction and the competition with other players through gaming. But most of all I enjoy the fact that this game allows everyone to think, re-think, take her/his time to travel back to that era, and finally submit orders under a spectrum of realism and nostalgia, hopefully on time!



Empires at War 1805 is a new game, just out of Beta. Our game has all the characteristics of online/browser game, but is turn based. We hate games that need players to be online 24/7 to be good, and we hate games that the more you pay real money the better your position becomes. So we would not be making a game like those, this is a real turn-based wargame, with elements that will remind board-gaming.

Our Website is here: www.eaw1805.com

Our Company website is here: www.oplongames.com

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY	8
CONFEDERATION OF THE RHINE	5
DENMARK	5
SPAIN	8
FRANCE	10
GREAT BRITAIN	10
HOLLAND	7
ITALY	5
PORTUGAL	7
MOROCCO	7
NAPLES	5
PRUSSIA	8
RUSSIA	10
SWEDEN	7
OTTOMAN EMPIRE	7
DUCHY OF WARSAW	7
EGYPT	7

Special Offer

for all games starting in
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New Prices at -50%.

Prices will not increase once the game has started!

A few words about Oplon Games: All 4 of us are Greeks, but we finished our degrees, MScs and Doctorates in England during the 90s. We were into the PBM explosion of the 90's playing multiple games of KJC, Madhouse, Pagoda Games, Zen Games, Harlequin Games and many others. Our favourite had been the hand-moderated Tribes of Crane. We have been in several gaming pub meetings, and many Flagship conventions. We created Total Conquest PBEM as students in 1999 which we sold to an American company. We are mostly into online gaming now, but always on turn-based games. We do this work part-time as a hobby, but we work every night and every weekend on it, we like it that much. By January we will have finished Empires at War (a huge 3 years long project and a very large investment that might not pay its money back but we don't really mind) and we will be making more games. That includes making computerized versions for PBM firms who want some automation or a Graphical User Interface.

Alien Nations

by James Patterson
jpattersonuk@gmail.com

I felt I really should put pen to paper and give this game a little of the coverage it's worth. Mike Brines is the GM and I've played and 'struggled' with Struggle of Nations whilst enjoying it in the past. I'd heard he had started a new space based version and decided to see if I could rule the Universe!

The beauty of this version is that I had the choice of playing as either a Hive mind (don't need to worry about being popular or feared) or a standard position where you actually need to consider your people... no brainer for me then, as considering the 'feelings' of the minions who populate my worlds is tiresome! And lo, the Betrayers came into being, a genetically created race that had rebelled and conquered their masters (yawn) cloned from The One.

For someone who plays in several games, it's nice to spread them out a bit and this one is weekly - hurray. Planning out your turn and getting it in is a pretty quick process with a brief summary of what happened to you and everyone else coming out in the Gazette with the odd line on your turn sheet. Hand moderated means you can do what you wish within the game mechanics; creating spaceship design, inventing new things to research, waging war, peace or trade, exploring the unknown galaxies whilst preparing for treachery at every step from not just your neighbors but unknown spacecraft and NPC Empires.

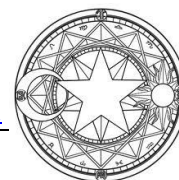
In my case, The One decided to spread his genetic material to the stars and so out went our newly built scout ships with our newly researched Hyperjump technology... and what wonders they have found over the months that followed. New worlds varying from barren wastelands to thriving worlds swarming with deadly aliens, enormous alien spaceships who either promptly vanished (with my forces on them!) or decided to burn a path east to west, the rise of horrific plagues, civil wars, crazed energy imbued nobodies who want to be Emperor and a whole variety of interplanetary war. I'm currently trying my best to conquer a nearby world containing the remnants

of my old Masters... in fact by the time you read this, they will already be under the control of my parasites turning them into hive minded workers!

Mike runs the games efficiently and without gloss to keep the turnaround tight and his model works well as it always has for Struggle of Nations. It's inexpensive at circa 5 Australian Dollars a turn, takes up little time unless you want it to, has good diplomacy options if you want them (weaklings) and is one of those games you actually keep checking your email for. Not quite the old thud on the doormat, but the modern equivalent!

Duel 2 Alamaze

From: Rick McDowell
rmcdowell@kingdomsofarcania.com



Twelve Newbies in One Alamaze Game

What we see below are a few accounts from newbie Alamaze players posted on our [Players' Forum](#) regarding their experience in their first game. This was an unusual game in that 12 of the 15 players were brand new and all players knew each other from the RSI game Duel 2 (formerly Duellmasters). This was especially interesting for me as I used to play Duellmasters, and had a friend in Paul Brown who ran RSI. RSI was next to the Alamaze booth at Origins / GenCon when Alamaze won the PBM Game of the Year Award, and Paul went on to license a version of Alamaze from me and engaged me to design their next game. You can get more Alamaze info and signup at the [Alamaze](#) website.

The below are straight from the players' posts, except where indicated with the *ED notations, mainly to explain Troll language.

Just a bit of explanation for some of the acronyms and Commendations referenced below. We recently introduced Commendations wherein active players at the end of an Alamaze game can recommend special recognition for other players in that game. The three commendations at present are:

- **Iron Willed.** This is a commendation for a player who persevered beyond all odds,

battling on rather than resigning even in the face of near certain (eventual) defeat. Often close-ended PBEM games can be unbalanced by drops, so Alamaze has an Honor system (to retain their important “Citizen” status a player cannot drop a position before turn 12), augmented by the potential of an award from being recognized by peers as Iron Willed.

- **Chancellor.** This is our mentoring commendation; with an experienced player nominated by new players for unselfish acts to aid their understanding and their learning the various subtleties and finer points in the game. We feel our experienced players are very willing to fill this role and are a source of pride in our community so we want them to be recognized.
- **Infamous.** This is an award for a player who in any number of possible ways, made the game unforgettable, increased the fun and intrigue, and likely involved some aspects of role playing to pull it all off.

These are the abbreviations for the kingdoms in Alamaze Classic:

AN – The Secret Servants of the Ancient Ones
 BL – The Dark Skies of the Black Dragons
 DA - The Onyx Imperium of the Dark Elves
 DE - The Seven Hells of the Demon Princes
 DW – The Dwarven Lords of the Talking Mountains
 EL - The Golden Woods of the High Elves
 GI - The Stone Giants Above the Trembling Ground
 GN – The Gnomish Bastions of Alchemy
 RA - The Rangers of the Frontier Marches
 RD - The Reign of Terror of the Red Dragons
 SO - The Hidden Realm of the Unseen Sorcerer
 TR - The Damned Lands of the Troll Uprising
 UN – The Shadow Brotherhood of the Underworld
 WA – The Fiery Reach of the Red Warlock
 WI - The Witchlord’s Empire of Doom

A couple terms referenced in the newbies’ accounts:

ESO – Early Strategic Objective. A set of conditions that, if met, provide substantial and important awards to the kingdom accomplishing them either on turn 10 or turn 15. There are more than 100 possible ESO’s.

SVC – Secret Victory Condition. Besides the Standard Victory conditions, each kingdom is assigned a SVC, a set of accomplishments that result in victory. Similar to the ESO, there are nearly 100 different SVC’s and this is the most common form of victory. A kingdom with a High Priestess can divine the secret intentions of any kingdom. The High Priestess risks death in the endeavor.

Duel 2 Alamaze - Game 105 Remembered (by persona Nitnux)

So that was pretty fun. I played SO in game 105. We had three players of recent Alamaze experience in Hawk (AN), Nikodemus (DE) and paway (RD) but the rest of us, mostly recruited from the Duel2 play-by-mail community, were all completely new to Alamaze. Because of this, the three pros made a point of going easy on us (at least while we were all floundering in the early game). They all gave out tons of advice and let us find our feet at our own pace.

EARLY GAME

IRL I was travelling a lot and my early game was abysmal, not only because of immense misunderstandings about rules, misreading the reaction/emissary tables, and my terrible proof-reading of my order sheets, but I also did a lot of inefficient things with my armies and personnel, and I mis-budgeted several of my early turns, meaning that many orders were wasted and I actually got no PC gains until turn 6.

Most foolishly of all, rather than focusing on the land grab I had been itching to see some different dynamics early on, regardless of proper strategy, so I ended up losing a level 5 agent in a failed assassination against Rangers in the R9 city, and I discovered how weak SO troops were when I was thoroughly beat up by a neutral village I should never have attacked. Still, I eventually had a battle victory and also got to exploit the broken Chaos mechanic to devastating success, when I landed on a stray WA town in Region 9 where he had two brigades and decent early

game wizards sitting very peacefully. None of these actions were of any value diplomatically or strategically, but being a noob I couldn't resist trying them out all the same.

When the scores came out with turn 6 I was in a very poor last place, though I had finally gained a first town. Despite that assassination attempt I made early peace with RA and also with DA and DW. I ceded my control claim of Region 9 to the Rangers to guarantee his ESO and we hoped to arrange mine for turn 15 though it ended up proving too tricky. DW took Region 3, DA took Region 6, and between the four of us we wanted to get stuck into war as soon as we could, planning to hit the Giants in Region 5 and the Black Dragons in Region 10.

Elsewhere on the map, WI was first to get regional control, taking Region 2 in turn 4. He was allied with EL who took Region 1 very soon after. The two of them kind of turtled for a good 10 turns, working on artifacts, training and economic consolidation, while the rest of us got stuck into various costly battles.

But the biggest dynamic within the game was unquestionably the AN/TR alliance. From turn 1, TR wanted to come out fighting, and boy did he pick fights with pretty much everyone around him. AN focused on keeping DE and RD disrupted (for honorable reasons he didn't attack new players but was happy for TR to do so) while TR started marching all over the southwest.

MID GAME

From turn 9 or 10, Rangers invaded Black Dragons, and Dwarves invaded Giants. I sent a couple of emissaries into Region 5 with the DW but I focused mainly on backing Rangers up in Region 10. Dark Elves were also present in both regions.

In Region 10 we had a pretty fun war. BL was allied with WA, but WA was defending himself against AN/TR. So we hoped BL would be an easy campaign, though it was anything but that. He fought every step of the way, winning several battles against RA and our progress was slow, though gradually our numbers advantage worked in our favour. Progress against the GI was also good to start with but he too proved himself in combat against the DW and halted our progress.

In the western conflicts I saw that RD and DE made some deft manoeuvres and for a long while it wasn't clear who had the upper hand, but AN/TR recruited GI and EL and by that point, essentially had unstoppable armies. At somewhere around the turn 15 mark, AN and GI swarmed into the DA in region 6, and EL attacked the DW, effectively neutralising my allies' offensive opportunities as they had to go into defensive mode.

UN and GN dropped in turn 16, having not made much impact in the game previously. I think they were already inactive and were defeated by TR long before that point.

By about turn 18, RA and I had taken most of Region 10, and I had an invisible p7 poised to strike the main BL army with Summon Deaths to finally try and take him down for good. However, the game-changer for us was the point WI announced his plans to invade Region 9 to start working on his SVC. He was pretty gentlemanly about it too, giving a couple of turns notice, and being extremely reluctant to fight anyone anyway.

At this point, me, RA, DW, DA, and the other beset-upon nations DE, RD, BL and WA realised that an SVC was imminent but might come out of the blue from any of GI, WI, AN, TR and EL. We had to defend together with whatever we could.

RA and I brokered immediate peace with BL/WA and I ceded pretty much all my Region 10 gains back to BL so he could try to feed his armies. So I never got to fight the BL on the field, which was just as well in retrospect because my army would certainly have been annihilated. He was a fun opponent. I would definitely fight beside him or against him in another game.

END GAME

From about turn 23 we tried to engineer a counter/defence/final stand. While Rangers and Dark Elves attacked AN/TR, DW continued fighting EL and I supported DA against GI in region 6. With the imminent arrival of WI we knew that it was going to end badly for the eastern coalition anyway. DE and RD were now out of the running but kept harassing AN/TR for as long as they the units to do so. They also kept the strategic advice coming, for the rest of the game.

When WI arrived in Region 9, he first apologised to the RA and then attacked him. Then he apologised to me and attacked me.

My armies weren't worth much, but with Summon Demon I killed the GI king as we speculated (maybe incorrectly) that he was closest to his SVC and then right after that, I killed the WI king. Those two turn results were the best news I got all game. WI returned the favour, but only after he had spoken to me and confirmed that we were going to continue fighting, and had reminded me that he now had artifacts protecting his new king.

In turn 26, AN and GI had knocked me out of Region 6 but for one short, glorious turn I gained the city and control of Region 9 before WI's numbers advantage started to tell. He swatted away my troops and emissaries and when his Summon Demon killed my king, I lost 10 influence in a single turn.

By turn 28, Rangers had been evicted from Region 9, Dwarves from Region 3, Dark Elves from Region 6, Black Dragons from Region 10 and I was down to a couple of PCs but with a few turns of gold to keep my emissaries busy, an army still hungry for enemy contact, and a P7-3-3 wizard team still itching to make someone suffer.

Turn 30: RA, BL, DA, DW and RD were all eliminated or dropped, having nothing left to fight with, but mostly all keen to return when we get a new game started.

At this point the eastern coalition was just WA, SO and DE, we were all bankrupt and probably had only one or two PCs between us. It became a concern to WI that his allies had taken too much other territory and he'd probably not be able to gain his SVC without stabbing one of them, which he was definitely not prepared to do. It was also likely that they might not have room to gain their SVCs and that we'd possibly be fighting until one of the other game-end criteria was reached, either turn 40 or the elimination of all the smaller players. So WI and I agreed to continue fighting in Region 9 anyway. I didn't know he'd given an artifact to TR but it figures with his sense of honour that he'd sacrifice something to help bring the game to a close.

On turn 32, the penultimate turn, at the gates of my final town, the main SO and WI armies were to finally meet on the field, but with a P10, P7 and P7 at his disposal, the WI was able to wipe away 11 innocent SO brigades before they could even finish their breakfast. So, when the battle commenced, I had a demoralised and devastated single brigade left, who felt it their duty to charge into a row of spears and mark their place in history.

Both AN and TR tried and failed an SVC check, and AN landed his immense army at my final town too.

For turn 33, WI asked again if I was still going to fight him. With both him and AN on my doorstep with massive armies, I only had one answer. As the TR claimed his hard-fought and well-deserved victory, my p7,3,3 and a rag-tag band of survivors were faced off against the enemy, and were crushed to the last man, at the gates of Fort Goliath, where now the banner of the AN proudly flies.

POST MORTEM

The scoring system did not reward me. 8 players finished the game and I ended up in 11th place, behind others who had gone out. I had had a slow start, was always short of PCs, never made HC, owned a city only for 2 turns all game and controlled a region for just 1 turn, and I never owned a single artifact all game, so my point earnings never really got off the ground.

The finishing players in order were TR, WI, AN, EL and GI, the western coalition who had all been ultimately successful in their campaigns, and then DE, SO and WA. We weren't the only players from the losing coalition who fought hard, we were just the ones that were able to hold onto something until the end.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the late game TR won a bid for the HC with 250,000 gold, being the most remarkable example of conspicuous consumption in gaming history.

Whether on the giving or the receiving end of king assassinations, Summon Demon was great fun either way.

In turn 32 I speculated with a 1 gold bid for an empty HC seat. I didn't win but it would have been a funny way to earn extra points.

In turn 32 I was comprehensively zapped by WI's p10-7-7. It was fitting that I could meet a noble death at the hands of a P10 called Ry Vor.

One example of my poor ordering: In turn 5 I had a 2 brigade group on 2 ships, and mistakenly tried to recruit another brigade, obviously illegally. The game auto-processing sunk my ships, my 2 brigades and a p2 wizard, all to my immense horror. Thankfully Cipher rectified the adjudication so it just disallowed my recruitment, and restored the brigades and wizard to life. Thanks Cipher!

I imagine this was an atypical game because of the learning curve for all involved. There was a lot of banter shared in the D2 chatroom between allies and enemies alike, and we shared lots of questions, battle reports, SVCs, and other tactical clues/details which would probably remain very secret in a second game. There was one accidental emissary usurping between DA/DW which DA was very apologetic about, but as far as I saw, everyone played with the utmost honesty and treated friends and foe with equal honour.

Thanks for arranging the game and recruiting me, Nikodemus! Looking forward to the next one.

MY COMMENDATIONS

Iron Will: Destitute Noble (WA). He was fighting against the odds, up against the biggest players for the whole game. Apart from my one-off surprise early battle, I didn't directly campaign against him while we were at war, and when we teamed up I wasn't in a position to support him directly. But he was stubborn as hell and when we formed the 'losers coalition' he kept going with energy for the fight, the whole way through. Kulvac (BL) was also a stubborn opponent for me and RA, and paway (RD) has to get a mention for the way his armies kept AN/TR at bay for a hell of a long time.

Chancellor: Nikodemus (DE). He recruited most of the players and made the arrangements to set this game up. He, Hawk (AN) and paway (RD) all helped the newcomers immensely, generally giving advice at the expense of their own game interests.

Infamous: Tripwire (TR). His desire to fight fight fight fight from the get-go was the dynamic that shaped this whole game, as he overwhelmed one opponent after another. He was funny in the D2 chatroom and dropped in to laugh at his own mistakes and (few) military defeats, mainly at the hands of RD. I didn't meet him in combat or even land in a PC of his, all game. I'm pretty grateful that I didn't.

Honorary Mention: There isn't a category for him but The Dark One (WI) was the most honourable player. He upheld all his agreements with allies, even to his cost. He wanted to play an artifact-based game rather than a war-based one so he was consistently apologetic about attacking people, and kept up a regular communication with me the whole time we were at war. He clearly got the game and played extremely well from the outset - it was just too crowded for him to engineer his own victory. Would definitely enjoy fighting with or against him again.

Duel 2 Alamaze - Game 105 Remembered (by persona Tripwire)

Me TROLL Rule the world! <Slobber>

Back at start me trolls couldn't find our bungs with a stick! Me had many problems and cried to Ancient peoples "Why me?! We poor trolls can't find bungs!" Ancient peoples helped trolls and we were friends. Me told Ancients, "We only care about Ancients and Trolls, me no like to talk to others. Me eat them all." Ancients said, "OK, me help you find bung." *Ed* The Troll finds a mentor and ally in the Ancient Ones.*

Trolls smiled and said, "Me eat your face!" and fight everyone. Sometimes even friends of Ancient Ones by accident! They other people were in towns and trolls eat towns and sometimes villages. I think we even ate Ancient Ones towns a few times or were going to but Ancient say, "Troll that's me!" I say, "OH whoops I no mean to eat you."

Big moment very early came when Ancient one say, "Troll you make floating sticks and float your trolls to the big city and fight!" Troll say, "We no float before! We no likely!" But Ancient ones show trolls how to make big boats and trolls surprise bad guy on water and smash them! Bad guy said, "WTF!? Why troll on floating sticks!?"

Troll say, "We eat your face! And then we ate their face and took city on water!" *Ed* The Troll invests in sea power in the Sea of Foreboding and captures Avalon.*

Then 'nother big moment when troll came to fight 2 big fights against giant lizards who like to fly in and blow fire and beat up trolls then fly away! Trolls no like fire! So Troll cry to Ancients, "Big lizards whipping my bung! Me need help!" So Ancients cast spell thingie and make the lizards go to sleep so troll can eat the face from the town while lizards sleepy. So we take 2 capitals from enemies without having to fight big lizards and some other bad guys. We ate the capitals faces though and it was good! *Ed* The Red Dragons became a problem for the Trolls, who received some magic assistance from their Ancient Ones ally.*

Then bad time came when Warlocky people appear out of nowhere! Then they eat troll army faces and fly away! Troll no like that so we go hunt Warlocky people and eat their faces and their momma's faces and daddys too!

Then trolls get confused and start eating more faces of ancient one friends and troll says, "Ancient one has lots of friends! Troll want to eat more face!" Ancient one says, "nononono! You fight that way!" So troll say "Sorry" and move on to other towns and villages and take those instead.

Then troll start buying talky trolls to talk to towns! Every town we take we put talky troll in it and we start to take towns without eating anything! Was very strange. *Ed* The Trolls begin to discover uses for their emissaries.*

Then trolls ate some more.. And talky trolls talked some more. Then Ancient one says, "What your SVC?" And troll say, "WTF is an SVC?" And had to go and look back and find out what that was. Then troll started pushing towards getting SVC to rule the world and eat all the faces. But Troll not have artifacts he needs. He has only looky artifacts. So he trade with other good guys and get artifacts. *Ed* The Troll Secret Victory Condition required artifacts other than scrying artifacts, so he makes a trade.*

Trolls had lots of shiny coins! Troll saw talky group that liked to talk and said, "Ancients! Me

want to talk on talky group!". Ancient said, "Use many shiny coins and they will put you on talky group." So troll load up hoards of shiny coins and put them and he got on talky group! People say, "WOW! That lots of shiny coins!" and Troll shrug and say, "We got many more shiny coins!" And people no like that. *Ed* The Troll joins the High Council with an outrageously high bid to gain the open seat.*

Then troll get key to open artifact he found but that was all troll needed to eat everyone's face and win the world. The END! *Ed* The Trolls win the campaign by Secret Victory Condition after recovering a powerful quest artifact: one that requires first obtaining the Key to allow access to the location of the quest artifact.*

Awards

INFAMOUS: Paway (The Silent One) and his Red Dragons! This was probably the only ASS whipping that the Trolls really got aside from the Warlocks surprise attack. Man the attack 1 is really a punishing attack on trolls. If they can't get in your face so to speak they are in trouble and none seemed to do it better than RD and their fire!

CHANCELLOR - Hawk definitely for me. I told him early on I didn't want to get into any huge alliances and regardless how it ended up and you can ask any of the allies that we had, I only went through him and just wanted to play an aggressive and attacking game. I never asked for much and gave gold away like crazy all game. I think I needed food 1 time in the game but that was it. And a few traded artifacts (Thanks guys!)

IRON WILLED- Destitute Noble- Definitely! I thought he was out like 3 times and he kept coming back. Near the end we got soooooo lucky. We saw he was back and we guessed that his AN3 I think it was would attack my group by surprise so "Just in case" We had TR1 attack on a 2 vs AN3 and then attack the town and sure enough he did attack and I slaughtered him bigtime. Another instance where Hawk saved my butt suggesting we do that.

Thanks to all I couldn't have done it without everyone else's help and the win definitely doesn't feel deserved with all the help I received with orders!

Duel 2 Alamaze - Game 105 Remembered
(persona The Dark One)

Well, that was my first game of Alamaze and it was a lot of fun. I think the best thing I did was take Hawk up on an offer of help early on. He pointed me in the right direction and left me alone to do what I wanted. My personal goals were to get the 'feel' of the game and hunt artifacts. So that's what I did. My goal was to snag the Ring of Power, so I started working on that right away, but it took a long while! I was able to gain region 2 early and made a bunch of non-aggression pacts with my neighbors, which I upheld with honor. My one official ally was the Elves, and Erik and I spent a bunch of the early turns trying to figure things out. Hawk helped out with advice as I needed it, which was often. I didn't want to / plan on actually attacking anyone all game.

And that worked out. I didn't have any early hitches and worked on powering up my wizards. Frankly, I was terrified that someone would show up with even a small army, as I had like zero military and as cool as the wizards are, you can't be everywhere at once. Fortunately, no one did. The only real hiccup was that I loaned D. Noble (WA) a ring of protection, but he got mauled by the TR and they took it...

Finally on turn 18 or so I managed to get the Ring of Power. It turned out I already had found the Ring of Spells and stumbled across the Ring of Invisibility, so I also managed to achieve one of the in game quests, which was highly cool!

With rings in hand, and everyone telling me to 'Get Involved' I decided to be a little more aggressive and decided that since I was already in Region 10 to get the Ring, I'd see about taking some PCs there. Since I was already friendly with everyone in the North, that seemed to work best.

So I ended up rumbling with the RA, and it turns out that high level wizards are really, really cool. Fortunately I was able to take some territory in 9 and 10 and eventually take over region 9. Had some good fights with both the RA and the SO along the way. Learned a lot more about how combat works and what to do with those high level wizards. Along the way I managed to get Ry

Vor up to LVL 10, but about a week after someone else already achieved that quest, dang it.

And so the game ended. Here is my list of acquired artifacts:

FULL NAME	POSSESSOR	TYPE	PTS
PALANTIR UNIKAR	MOVIUS	COVERT	300
STANDARD OF VALOR	2nd WITCHLORD	WEAPON	300
STONE OF ALL MINDS	2nd WITCHLORD	WIZARD	400
GREAT AXE OF HURBLIND	1st WITCHLORD	WEAPON	400
ELAN, FLAMING SWORD OF THE NORTH	2nd WITCHLORD	WEAPON	600
RING OF SPELLS	1st WITCHLORD	WIZARD	300
GREAT RED BATS OF THE LOST CAVES	1st WITCHLORD	BENEVOLENT	400
RING OF POWER	2nd WITCHLORD	WIZARD	600
RING OF INVISIBILITY	VIPERHEAD	COVERT	400
ANCIENT ANNIHILATOR	VIPERHEAD	COVERT	200
RING OF PROTECTION	MOVIUS	BENEVOLENT	200
STAFF OF DISDAIN	MOVIUS	KING	400

Finally, my highlights of the game were:

Taking Region 2 on Turn 4, which was cool
Trading assassinations of our kings with the SO
Finding the 3 Rings and solving the quest
Level 10 Wizard!

My thanks go out to Floyd/Nikodemus for setting up the game and offering advice, OAB (The Silent One) for also giving me some tips, Erik (Otto X) for being a great ally and most of all, Hawk, for helping me through the growing pains and not laughing at me when I screwed stuff up.

Finally just a few notes about what I liked about Alamaze:

I really enjoy hunting artifacts. Great aspect of the game.

I like the magic and the balance of it. Not sure why the invisibility aspect of the game is getting changed, because wizards are helpless militarily. If

you can see them coming and kill their wizards, it's all over, baby. Seems unnecessary.

I think the map should ideally be more randomized, but that's another thing. It could also be larger to allow for more exploration before conflict is imminent.

Emmisaries seem too powerful, rebelling and flipping PCs at will... Seems like that could be a little harder.

I like a lot of the subtle and detailed orders - very cool - shows a lot of work went into the game.

Mostly though, it was a fun time and I enjoyed it! Looking forward to playing again!

A Moment with Debby and Olaf

by Debby and Olaf

Things were quiet in the head office of Reality Simulations, and everyone was happy about that. It made a break in the non-stop action. Olaf Modeen and Debby Tonte, reporters for the Duel 2 newsletters, were standing by the coffee machine talking. Not that Olaf drank coffee, being dead, but he liked the company.

"Have you heard the latest?" Debby asked.

"Probably, but tell me anyway."

"Somebody wants to interview US for some newsletter! I didn't know they could do that! I thought being reporters meant we were safe from all that."

"Nobody's ever safe from reporters," Olaf said. "But I think... I might just go find a quiet cemetery and get out of sight for a while." He squinted at his blonde companion. "And you should go find a sunny beach--"

The door slammed open and Conan the Barbarian entered, looking even larger than real in furs and mail and a really big sword. "Nobody 'interviews' me!" he roared. "I say we go rip their faces off!"

Someone came in behind him and shut the door quietly. "No," the Dreaded Green Eyes said. "You don't have to do interviews if you don't want to, but you WILL be polite."

Turn-Based Gaming

by Darth Pedro – AKA – Jack Linville

This is a submission for what is intended to be a regular featured article in the new PBM Magazine being published by GrimFinger.

Installment #1: Introduction

When asked to consider producing an article for this new magazine, *Suspense & Decision*, I quickly processed my personal knowledge and responded with the topic of "Turn-Based Gaming". Being an older gamer with a long history dating back into the 1970's, I have quite a bit of experience in several aspects of gaming which inevitably resolved to focus in areas of previous interest such as military history. Therefore I will try to remain within the context of turn-based military games of all levels of complexity. Some of the more complex of these have been considered to be simulations, rather than "just games" for the purpose of entertainment and competition. We will touch on both during this discussion.

My first exposure to what may be considered a turn based-game is the game of Checkers. Then came Chinese Checkers and later Chess. In my youth there were many other board games like Monopoly, Stratego, Broadside, etc. I would like to define the exclusion of these games from the subject at hand because I consider them to be what I will call Move-Based Games.

To make this clear let me say that a move-based game is more or less open-ended with completion dictated by concise victory conditions. To start the game it must be determined who makes the first "move", but there is no inherent limit on how many alternating (or rotating) player moves take place in order to achieve said victory conditions. So does a "turn" consist of both (or all) player moves, or just each individual player's move? Does the red player in Checkers make his move or his turn, or does he simply make one move during his turn? Hopefully this will stimulate some thought on what I am leading up to.

A turn-based game could have two or more players, each making a move in rotation with no real turn structure. A turn-based game may have

the same players all completing one move and upon said completion, the turn is ended, with possible events applied to all players at that time prior to the initiation of the next turn. The first player turn could vary. The player rotation could be fixed perpetually with some random method (die roll), or qualification by calculation, used to determine the “first move” in subsequent turns. In addition a turn-based game could include the lifting of the limitation on “number of pieces moved” by each player during his “turn”. This concept of moving all, some or none of a player’s pieces became prevalent with the map-board style of war-game first made popular by Avalon Hill and others soon following.

To make things even more complex we must identify the concepts of game-turn versus player-turn. In military styled war-games we may see all players completing their turns and then calling that one game turn. Several game turns may be grouped into a “Cycle” or “Phase” wherein abstract, or not so abstract, processes address things like industrial manufacturing, strategic off-map movement, etc. All of these words and concepts can be jumbled and redefined by the game designer in order to fit the needs at hand. There is no set-in-stone nomenclature although there is some consensus with outlying differences of opinion. I will try to leave these semantics to the game lawyers. In any case, the rules for such games can become very complex.

Let’s assume the term “game turn” applies to the completion of one “turn” by each of the several players in the game. Let’s assume the term “player turn” may consist of one or more “moves” of player pieces (or units) as defined by the rules of said game. The game turn may additionally consist of several separate “phases” within which each player in rotation or simultaneously may process specific aspects of the game mechanics. On the other hand each player turn may be divided into several phases and possibly other players provided opportunities to interact with events resulting from the acting player’s actions “as they occur”. This methodology can become very complex and result in a much more interactive experience as potentially all players can act or respond during each player’s move. Remember that such games

as described were intended originally to be played in person on a table.

Example:

We will use the example of a two player turn based military board game using die-cut unit counters and a hexagonal map grid overlaying the terrain map. The map scale in this example will be one (1) mile per hex and the time scale will be one (1) hour per turn. The unit scale will be one (1) regiment per counter. Each player will setup the unit counters on the map using the specific rules defined for that purpose. The first player is determined by whatever rules are in place. In this example, player one will be the Blue side and player two will be the Red side. The rules allow the movement of “all, some or none” of the acting player’s units during the “movement phase”. “Combat Odds” are then calculated and resolved using a formulated “Combat Results Table” and some form of die rolling indexed upon that table. The results of said combat/s may include elimination, step-reduction, retreat and/or advance of specific combatant units on the map; thus concluding the “combat phase”. If the game includes an “exploitation or mechanized movement phase”, the acting player may now move his qualifying units to shift reserves, reinforce penetrations of the enemy front or even to exploit such penetration by moving said units through the gaps formed by combat and into the enemy rear. This can become very complex.

So let us return to the main concept of this magazine; Play-By-Mail (PBM) Gaming. How could such an involved and interactive game process as that described above be implemented in a PBM format? Because of the exploitation phase injected into the example given, some difficulty arises when implementing a PBM process. We are now reduced to alternating phases within the turn structure. We now realize that some formats of game design lend themselves more readily to the PBM format. With the advent of our computer age and the internet, more opportunities for complexity become doable while retaining some form of timeliness in the game flow. At some point we must decide on whether we want to play the “forever game” or do we want something that resolves in a timely

fashion and is not subject to the "player who dies last wins the game" result?

HYBORIAN WAR: A mind-blowing experience?!

by Charles Mosteller

GrimFinger@grimfinger.net

"Reading through the rules of Hyborian War is a mind-blowing experience, and makes me want to do some type of Barry Smith inspired Conan cover for the next issue."

- **A. Kaviraj** (Front cover artist for issue # 1 of Suspense & Decision magazine, who had not previously encountered PBM games.)

A mind blowing experience. Wow! Just imagine if he had actually played the game, yet.

From my own first-hand experience in playing Hyborian War over the years, I can attest to the fact that it can be both addicting and a lot of fun to play. Along with Middle-earth PBM and Galaxy: Alpha, Hyborian War is a play-by-mail game that helped to mold my views on the postal genre of gaming. Those are three crown jewels of the genre against which I measure all other comers to the hobby.

The greatest strengths of Hyborian War, as far as its game design goes, are its character system, and the setting of the Hyborian Age made famous by author Robert E. Howard. Certain magic spells, such as fire wall, black death, reincarnate, and prophecy stand out in my mind as worthy of honorable mention.

Within the character system, itself, it is the names of the characters that imbue the game with a lot of flavor, with characters from different kingdoms enjoying their own respective exotic flair, where character names are concerned.

But, the name methodology, however colorful that it might be, is of secondary importance. It is the characters' attributes in seven different categories that lies at the very heart of why Hyborian War remains a personal favorite of many PBM gamers, after many years of playing the game.

As the game progresses, certain turns, called peace years turns, help to advance the passage of

time within the game, for these characters. They age and they die, with the passage of time.

Hyborian War has three main elements of play - troops, characters, and provinces. If the character system were removed from the game, then Hyborian War would have died off long, long ago. Of that, I have no doubt.

Conquest of provinces is the path by which all kingdoms grow in size. Yet, characters enjoy the possibility of halting invasions by enemy armies through resort to peace treaties and the disrupting of war pacts.

Hyborian War can be a frustrating games, at times, due to characters successfully negotiating peace. Yet, it can also be a wonderfully invigorating game. Through the play of it and through inter-player diplomacy, many great and lasting friendships can be forged.

Of all the PBM games that I have played down through the years, I played Hyborian War the longest - more than all the rest of them put together, in fact. Yes, I liked it THAT much! It's a great game. It's not a perfect game, but I have yet to encounter a game that I consider to be more enjoyable.

The province-based conquest system reminds me of the board game, Risk, a lot. But, it is there that the similarities with Risk end.

It is the players of Hyborian War, replete with their respective colorful individual personalities, that cement the Hyborian War playing experience for me. The largest gathering of players of the game can be found over on Lloyd Barron's website, The Road of Kings, which can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.warbarron.com/>

If you're tired of playing other games, whether of the play-by-mail variety or any other kind, then I heartily recommend Hyborian War to one and all, alike. Give it a try, and check it out for yourself.

If you dare.

Fallen Empires

:by Rob Harding
robharding@btinternet.com



Fallen Empires is an open ended hand moderated fantasy pbem set on the continent of Clantium, a mysterious land of dangerous beasts, vagabond tribes and alliances with their stronghold cities . The game is run from the UK by father and son team of Peter/James Perrin and turnaround is on a two weekly basis. A playtest of the game was run for a year allowing the GM's to complete fine tuning based on their experience and importantly player feedback. The game launched officially in March 2013 and currently has 21 active players covering 45 positions.

There are various positions to choose from within the game, at the time of writing there are tribes, mercenary units, settlement (village) leaders and political figures who control a city or groups of cities and their standing armies. As the game develops additional positions may become available such as religious figures. Each type of position will have benefits and challenges to overcome and allows a player to roleplay or powerplay their way through the game.

Having decided on your position you provide a description for the GM's which can cover the history, beliefs, appearance and aims in order for them to tailor their responses accordingly. Given this flexibility in the startup it is no surprise that tribes are roaming the continent with a wide variety of cultural influences, examples encountered to date include vikings, romans, native american Indians and wildings.

Once your setup is completed you will be given a starting point on the map of Clantium (30 * 60 hex grid system). This can be in terrain varying from tundra, desert, forest, grassland and many more. The GM's will take into account your setup & history, for example the Native American Indian tribe started in a grassland environment.

Turns are produced using excel spreadsheets which cover the basic game mechanics such as trading, manufacturing, research, population increases and possessions. Word documents are used by the players to send in their major and minor actions which are free form text and limited only by in game technology and your imagination. These actions can range from improving your positions military strength through detailed organization or training plans through to designing your own clothing products for resale! One player in the game was desperate to learn how to make recurve bows after meeting a mercenary unit which possessed them. His plan was stunningly simple, talk to one of the said mercenaries in a tavern and buy him vast amounts of ale. The mercenary after several hours was in a drunken sleep, at which point the tribal leader took possession of his recurve bow and hightailed it out of the city whereby his weapon smiths started to learn the process of their construction.

All positions will have specialists available for use, these can range from master at arms (to recruit more people or to train warriors), weapon smiths, armourers, herders (to capture/breed/cull animals), craftsmen (to make items), masons (to construct buildings), foremen (to oversee work) and many more which can be created by the player. Each specialist will have a set number of craft points to spend each turn, for example weaponsmiths may be used to produce Broad swords or research a new type of weapon. The general rule being the more complex / effective the item the longer the research will take and the more craft points required to make them.

There are elements of magic within the game, although at this stage it is unclear just how widespread and effective they are. Necromancers have been involved in battles and melded creatures have been encountered with hints of other dark magic thrown in. As people experiment

and discover different powers more will become known.

Playing as a tribe / merc unit as you move around the continent each sector will possess something of interest which if investigated further will usually reap rewards for the player. One example of this being a tribe who moved through a sector and discovered a village had a bull for sale. Deciding not to investigate further his ally passed though not long after, brought the bull and in return received a % increase in his cattle production each turn. Given that cattle can be culled to produce horn and hide which are used for making weapons and armour, suffice to say he was a little smug. In case you're wondering, yes, I still bang my head against the wall for not buying the bull!

Settlements positions centre around developing a small village with basic resources, buildings and defenses and improving it over time to become prosperous and a place of safety for its people. A settlement leader has to make critical decisions each turn, do you build the walls or construct buildings to improve the lot of your people. Should you concentrate on recruiting more people to join or train the ones you already have to be more effective ... Are your neighbours potential allies or enemies waiting to strike – do you send a diplomatic party to investigate them or wait for them to approach you?

An interesting area of running a settlement or city is the option to become a specialist in an area which will add to the status / profitability / defensive measures. A settlement in an area of grassland may decide to become a centre of equine breeding, using the plains to capture horses and breed different types which can be sold for profit. This can be achieved through the free form text actions available to the player.

Clantium is a dangerous place with many fierce creatures to fear. Trolls, Cyclops, bears, minotaur, giant spiders all can lay in wait ready to attack the unwary. It is rumoured that some tribes have captured and trained beasts to fight alongside them in battle.

Should your position find itself in a battle a report will be produced by the GMs and published to all. These reports can vary in length but on

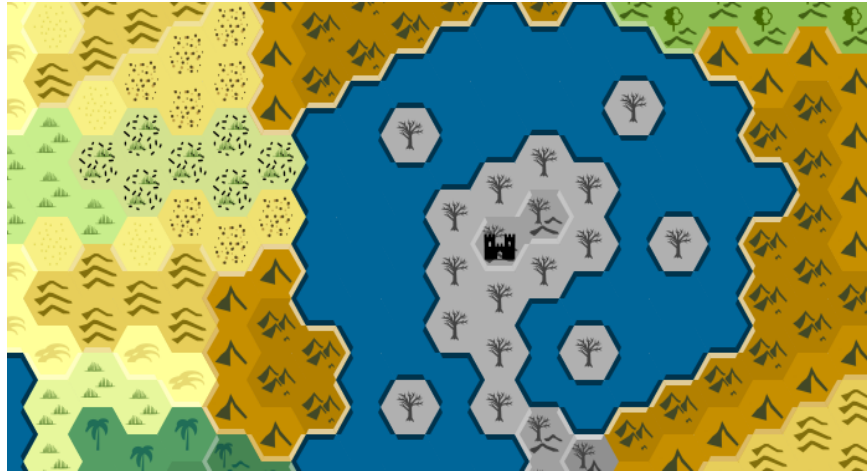
average are between 2-3 sides of A4 paper. The level of detail in these battle reports and the quality of writing are second to none, and valuable information can be gained on friends and enemies alike. Standard battle plans can be entered with turns which your men will follow. There appears to be no limits to player cunning and devious plans. During a city defence which lasted for 5 turns a player at the beginning of the siege hid assassins in captured uniforms within camouflaged pits in the enemy camp. What follows below is the result of the action and an extract from the GM produced battle report.

General Stravian watched as his cavalry held off the two thousand cavalry and chariots opposing him, he would need to react quickly to this new turn of events. The bodyguard around him formed a shield wall to protect him while he shouted out orders. So long as the cavalry and chariots were defeated, which seemed quite likely, he should be able to snatch victory from defeat. He turned to his aid to find him dead on the ground, with a soldier stood over him. The soldier looked him in the eye and smiled. Stravian looked around him, and saw he was encircled by men whom he did not recognise. They turned inwards as one, and the sergeant rammed his sword into Stravians throat, "Regards from Morning Star of the Chayan General" the General heard him say.

I've been part of Fallen Empires from the beginning of the play test and seen the game develop over the last 18 months into a game which reliably produces high quality turns to a steady turnaround for very reasonable fees. The GM's are approachable and listen to suggestions for game improvement, many of which are implemented to advance the game further. There are still one of two areas which require investigation and improvement, city trading for example. Currently the prices of goods are the same regardless the location of cities thus making trading for a profit difficult. However, pub meets are being arranged where players can meet the GMs face to face and suggestions put forward. One suggestion also being discussed is to hold a skype meet with the GM's and foreign players to ensure fairness to all.

Diplomacy between players outside of the game is usually in the form of email, skype or the

FALLEN EMPIRES



LEAD YOUR TRIBE TO GLORY, RUN A MERCENARY COMPANY, BUILD THE STRONGEST SETTLEMENT OR BE A POLITICAL MASTER ON THE CONTINENT OF CLANTIUM IN FALLEN EMPIRES - A PLAY BY EMAIL ROLE PLAY/STRATEGY GAME.

Fallen Empires is a Role Playing game by email. Each turn you, the player, send in your instructions as to movement, actions etc. to the Games Master (GM). The instructions are partly in the form of calculations on a spread sheet and partly in the form of written instructions.

Email us at for more details: fallenemp@gmail.com

Or look at our facebook page: <http://goo.gl/2rKO5Q>

Or read some of our Battle, Historical or Alliance reports: http://www.scribd.com/james_perrin_9

good old fashioned telephone. A newsletter is produced by one of the players on a regular basis which covers tips, news & current events. As rumours of player led alliances are circulating no doubt diplomacy will reach new heights as each vie for power and survival.

For the older amongst the readership of this magazine you may remember one of the early pbm games Tribes of Crane which ran for many years under various companies before folding several years ago. The game had a very loyal player base and Peter Perrin, a former GM of Crane has taken the best elements of this well-loved game and produced Fallen Empires with the same feel. By introducing the spreadsheets to automate the basic game mechanics a workable system appears to be in place which should allow the game to run for many years and turn a profit for the hard work which goes into every turn.
Fallen Empire Links and Information

Facebook page

<http://goo.gl/2rKO5Q>

Email

fallenemp@gmail.com

Example Battle Reports

http://www.scribd.com/james_perrin_9

Costs

Land Tribe or Settlement £2 per turn.

Political Figure £4 per turn for one city.

Mercenary Company £1 per turn.

Sea Tribes (about to be launched) £2 per turn

PBM is Dead, Long Live PBM

by Ixnay

If you are reading this, the inaugural issue of the world's newest PBM magazine (and probably the only current one), then you are probably an active PBM gamer. You have played multiple

games, you have friends you've never met in person, you've sensed the electrical surge of anticipation as a turn-result arrives in your mailbox or inbox. In other words, "you get it."

But ask almost any PBM gamer their thoughts on the future of this tiny little sub-genre of gaming and they'll tell you that PBM is dead. It's on it's last legs, there are only a few isolated pockets of players, everyone is forty or older, the internet is sucking out all the air from our little corner, etc etc.

By most conventional measures, this is a fairly accurate assessment. The number of professional games out there is much lower than it was in the 1980's, which was perhaps the heyday of PBM. There are no longer PBM conventions, or even PBM awards at gaming conventions. The premiere fora for games, be they computer games, board games, or whatever seem generally unaware that PBM even exists.

Perhaps more alarmingly, we see all around us a surge in interest in the subject of gaming in general. The euro-gaming movement has long since crossed the oceans and boardgaming in every segment is stronger than its ever been. Massive multiplayer online games have literally *millions* of players and sport multi-million dollar budgets. Computer games and console games have taken such a deep hold in pop culture that they earn more money each year than Hollywood movies. And everywhere you look these days, you see people "crushing candy" on their phones or having "words with friends" or grinding away at their farms, criminal mobs, or fantasy empires on facebook.

It is easy to conclude that PBM, never really a big presence even at its zenith, is fading away along with text adventure games, bridge clubs, and trundling your wooden hoop down the lane on the way to the May fair in the village commons.

But even now on its deathbed, PBM shows signs of life and even, dare I say, vitality!

First, in my recent explorations for PBM games to play, I have been surprised at the number of commercial operations out there. Some of them have been chugging away since 1970 (cough Flying Buffalo cough), while

some have entered service relatively recently. In many cases, they serve isolated pockets of players who seem somewhat unaware of the wider PBM community. A month ago I signed up for a new game of Legends (which is an old masterpiece brought back to life and thoroughly updated by Harlequin Games) in which I have been chatting with the team of veteran players I was assigned to. One of them, who had played a number of PBM games in the 80s, was literally surprised to learn that there was a general-interest PBM site out there, and that there were other large-scale commercial games still running.

There seems to be an especially strong core of PBM fandom in europe. If the stunning success of Settlers of Catan and the resulting boom in eurogaming across the world is any guide, this augurs well for our niche hobby.

Second, a number of PBM games are moving aggressively into the modern age. It's not just that they transmit turns via email (which is pretty much the standard these days), it's that they are embracing technology to improve the gaming experience. Legends and others publish a client-app that offers graphical displays, data-driven dashboards, and order-writing tools to make sure players can stay focused on gameplay and diplomacy rather than technical details. Play-by-web is a similar option being hosted by many new providers. With the onslaught of smartphones, we can no doubt expect to see PBM games and their ilk take up residence there, providing players with a hit during conference calls and bus rides.

Third, there is a class of games out there that could be called PBM-likes. (This is in the tradition of Rogue-likes -- computer games that are close cousins to the original computer dungeon-crawler game characterized by text inputs, primitive graphics, and replay addiction.) When I tried Mob Wars on facebook, I was struck by the notion that it was in essence akin to PBM gaming. You direct your gang to undertake certain actions, which might affect other players, and which will take a certain amount of "real time" to resolve. Players are left either hitting refresh buttons or checking the progress of their mobs throughout the day. This game, along with the farming games, the fantasy empire games, and many others, has generated such a splash (and so much in

revenue) that the fortunes of large companies have been committed to build the market.

Fourth, even as the internet has exploded and sucked people's time away from other pursuits, it has also empowered community and growth with surprising vigor. Boardgamegeek is now a huge web portal with deep resources available to help gamers mix and mingle, buy and sell, expand their horizons, and just generally multiply their enjoyment of advanced board games. This evidence -- that people will still sit around a table and push tokens around a board or collect cards in their hand when they could be playing World of Warcraft -- suggests that there is still demand out there for gaming on a more contemplative level.

Finally, as evidence that rumors of PBM's death have been greatly exaggerated, you have in your hand the first new PBM magazine in years, birthed from the first new general-interest PBM forum launched in years. Such commitments aren't made, such plans are not executed, such endeavors not reached for, without a firm sense that there is indeed a thriving (if still small) community of truly dedicated PBM gamers out there.

While the old days of large dot-matrix printouts arrived in your mailbox every month might be over, along with the horrifying long-distance charges on your phone bill, the light of PBM gaming (and that of play-by-email, play-by-web, play-by-Facebook, and other PBM-likes) shines brightly enough, and in some ways brighter than ever before.

A Journey Together Awaits

by Charles Mosteller
GrimFinger@grimfinger.net

It's been a long while, since a new PBM magazine came into existence. By my reckoning, anyway. But, first things first.

It is both my duty, as both editor and publisher of this new magazine, and my misfortune to eat crow. You see, I missed the deadline, the final one of two that I had initially set for launching this new rag. This dish of crow is platter-size, and it's mine, and mine alone, to suffer through.

Of course, in all fairness, it wasn't the first deadline missed in the long, colorful, and checkered history of PBM magazines and their publication dates. If history is any guide, it probably won't be the last deadline missed, either. You don't have to take my word for it, though. Research past PBM magazines, and discover the truth for yourself.

All things considered, I think that we did a pretty good job of getting anything off the ground, at all. By we, I mean just, exactly that - WE. You, me, and anyone else that contributed in any way, whatsoever. I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to all involved, to all who were willing to lend a hand in helping to make issue # 1 possible, at all.

So, here we are. A new magazine. A new format. A new name. A new editorial crew. I can hear some of you, now. Just what in God's name was Charles thinking?

I'll be the very first to admit that thinking is probably not my strongest suit. So, I'll have to ask everyone to pardon me for thinking that we need something that we used to have several of - a PBM magazine.

Maybe we're off to a bit of a rough start, what with missing the publication deadline for our very first issue by a matter of mere days. But, which is worse? To miss a publication deadline? Or to miss having a PBM magazine, at all, to browse through?

Perhaps the launch date for issue # 1 was a bit overly-ambitious. Maybe opting to strive for a monthly rate of publication for future issues is just a tad too ambitious, as well. Then again, maybe what the play by mail community needed all along was an ambitious approach, inherently prone to being flawed in its implementation that it may yet prove to be.

In the old days, we had the likes of David Webber to do the job for us, with his memorable magazine called Paper Mayhem. We had Nicky Palmer with his Flagship magazine. We had numerous others, too, such as Bob Mclain and his Gaming Universal, and most recently, at least some of us were witness to Carol Mulholland steering Flagship through to its final issue.

And then . . . Nothing.

No more PBM magazines to be found, scour the Internet, though we may.

Lest anyone wonder, I assure you, I am no David Webber. God rest his soul! David didn't do the job of making Paper Mayhem happen clear through to its last issue, all by himself, though. Nope! While David tended to get most of the credit, his wife, Elaine, she played a crucial role, as well.

And Carol Mulholland, she didn't invent Flagship magazine. She merely took the reins at some point along the way. Others, such as her

husband, Ken, left their mark prior to Carol doing her best to meet deadlines and to continue the tradition.

If the tradition of PBM magazines is to be continued, then somebody, somewhere has got to do it. It just seemed that nobody really wanted to do it. Or, maybe some did. Sure, some probably did. I know for a fact that at least a few did. But, we still weren't getting anywhere.

And for some, we probably are still viewed as having gotten nowhere.

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Turns are on a twice-a-week cycle which players love. Fees are kept low by our monthly subscription plans that equate to less than \$2 a turn (WHAT???) at our Warrior Level Service (2 simultaneous Alamaze games.)

But, hey! They're entitled to their opinion, right?

Certainly. No question about it. Even still, I felt that the ball needed to be carried forward.

In the end, when all was said and done, the one that picked the ball up and ran with it wasn't me. It was a fellow by the name of Mark Wardell, a chap that I have often referred to in the past as the Mad Scientist of PBM. Who do you think did the lion's share of putting this digital rag together? Much like Elaine Webber of Paper Mayhem, Mark's role is far more significant than many of you might have, at first, envisioned.

Mark wanted a PBM magazine called PBM Gamer to exist. He didn't get his wish. Me? I wanted to name the magazine Turn-Based Titans, initially, a few years back. It appears that I didn't get my wish, either - and I'm the guy that actually named this new magazine that you're reading, right now.

In fact, nobody that expressed to me what we should call this magazine got their wish. So, how did we end up calling it Suspense & Decision, then?

I love PBM games. I truly do! I love the genre of postal gaming, of playing games by post. They're not the only games that I love, but by God, PBM gaming holds a special place in my heart. You see, play by mail gaming isn't just about playing games. Oh, no! It's more - much more - than just that. You see, PBM games are not just about what you are playing, but also, they are about HOW you are playing the games that you are playing.

PBM games are fun. But, then again, what games aren't? Board games, card games, online games, multi-player games, all sorts of games. Games, games, and more games. Fun, fun, and more fun!

But, play-by-mail games are not just fun. No, they have more than just that, than just plain, old, ordinary fun, to offer the prospective player.

What they offer you is an experience. A true, honest-to-God experience. I really don't know how to describe it better than that.

No other genre of gaming that I have ever partook of, that I have ever tried, including many

of these fancy new-fangled computer and Internet games, have ever even remotely come close to matching the gaming experience that PBM games have offered me, down through the years. I love Internet games. I love online multi-player games. Hell, I love the Internet, itself!

It's great! It's wonderful! It's amazing, absolutely amazing!

But, for all of the accolades and praise that I could heap upon it, the Internet, for all of its wonders and for all of the glorious things that it has to offer, even after all of these many years, now, of using the Internet on a daily basis, it still has yet to even remotely approaching the full Monty that is the gaming experience that PBM games were offering me almost thirty years ago.

As you browse through this modern-day incarnation of a play by mail magazine, you will undoubtedly realize that there's an awful lot of PBM companies and their wares missing. An invitation was extended, however. It still is, in fact. I don't know if they all got it. Perhaps at least a few of them were busy with countless other things that life has thrown their way. If you see any of them, or if you otherwise encounter any of them, or if you just plain happen to be one of them, then know this - This PBM magazine is for YOU, too. It really is.

This is all fine and dandy, of course, but let's get back to how - and why - this magazine got the name that it ended up being branded with.

Should it be a PBM magazine? Should it deal with turn-based games? What is the core concept? How do we encompass everything that matters, without polluting it with too much that simply doesn't matter? What is the primary aim of this endeavor? What is the essence of what it should contain? What is the extent of what it should extend to?

How do we take technology into account? Should it cover traditional PBM only? Is PBEM to be excluded? Or what about play by web? What about PBM-likes? What name would best serve the scope and the scale and the everything else that matters to those of us who both like the nostalgia of PBM games from the past, even as we have grown more than just a little fond of all of

those yummy new fun games that technology and the passage of time have brought us?

Are we TBG? MTBG? MPTBG? Are we something else? Let me ask you this, each and every last one of you - Just exactly what in the Hell are we? Do we even know? For that matter, do we even have to know?

I'm merely trying to launch a new PBM magazine, and if we also cover ancestral descendants of those very same play by mail games, then so be it, from my perspective. If, in the course of doing so, we also happen to find and to discuss some other gaming related stuff that we encounter along the way, then is it really the end of the proverbial world if we include some other stuff along the way?

I don't know who invented play by mail gaming, nor do I really care. I don't have the PBM credentials of Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo fame. I don't carry the PBM gravitas of Steve Tierny, Mica Goldstone, or Lee Kline.

To be quite honest with you, with each and every last one of you, I know nothing about running a magazine, much less the first thing about how to create one from scratch and get it up and running and out the proverbial door within such a very short time frame. From my perspective, we were at Point A, and rather than worry about Point Z, I simply wanted to move us to Point B.

Welcome to Point B - Suspense and Decision magazine!

When you're waiting for your next turn results in that favorite PBM game of yours, whatever it might be and run by whatever PBM company or PBM game moderator that you like the most, what do you feel?

When you're waiting by the mailbox, for that next turn results envelope to arrive, what do you feel?

When you've sent your turn orders off for that really crucial turn, tell me this, my play-by-mail friend - What do you feel?

Do you ever feel suspense? I have, and on more occasions that I can ever remember.

Sure, there's anticipation. I've felt that. But, those really important wars, those battles that truly mattered, didn't you ever feel more than just mere anticipation?

That's suspense that you've been feeling. You've been feeling it all along.

Steve Tierny of Madhouse, as infamous a name associated with PBM gaming as you are ever likely to find, suggested the name "Turnaround" for this new PBM magazine of ours, the one that you're still reading, right now, no matter how much you hate the name of it. I liked that name, Turnaround, a lot.

Dean Johnson of Harlequin Games felt that this new magazine needed a slant that was greatly TBG - turn-based gaming. Yet, isn't Harlequin Games stable of games, these ancestral descendants of former PBM games that they are bringing to a modern world, just conduits for suspense by another name?

And what about Rick Loomis, the very individual widely credited throughout the commercial PBM industry and across PBM circles for some forty years or more? He suggested that I call the new magazine the PlayByMail.Net Dispatch. His suggestion made one heck of a lot of sense - The name, itself, would actively promote the website. He was right, you know. It most assuredly would have done just, exactly that.

So, why then risk going with a name that no one suggested, one that at least some - and perhaps more than just a few - might very well hate?

Well, you see, virtually everything that I have done, PBM-wise, has had at least some form of risk attached to it, all along. The risk that I will fail has always existed. It exists now. It shall continue to exist in the future.

When you are poring over your turn results, and when you are pondering your next turn's orders, what lies at the crux - indeed, at the very nexus - of what you are doing? Decision, that's what!

Suspense & Decision.

Yes, there's a turn-based aspect. And, yes, there's certainly a turn-based slant. Most assuredly, there's turn-based this and turn-based

that. There's the multi-player aspect, also. For that matter, there's all sorts of aspects that are associated with PBM gaming and play-by-mail games.

But, underneath it all, when you take the time out to ponder and to probe and to think it through, PBM gaming is - and has always been - permeated with suspense, and both its very long and storied existence, as well as its future perpetuation, are, ever have been, and ever will be dependent upon decision.

Suspense and Decision.

My role is not, and never was, to act as an arbiter of which characterization of the hobby that so many of us love and hold dear to our hearts, a PBM hobby that has filled us to the brim with an overflow of good memories, should ultimately prevail. For all that I care, everyone and his brother can continue arguing about how to best characterize the games that we enjoy so. If you have a dog in that fight, then by all means, feel free to argue away.

What I bring to this new PBM magazine is not a long-standing legacy of expertise. Rather, I am simply an average, ordinary fellow, one that just so happens to love the play by mail genre of gaming. I run a website that features a decent amount of downloadable material relating to Reality Simulation, Inc.'s long-running PBM game, Hyborian War, over at GrimFinger.Net. I also run the PlayByMail.Net website, which I tout as a place where fans of Play By Mail games can congregate. More recently, I have tried to bring into existence the PBM Wiki website. Credit for that idea lies properly with Mark Wardell, though. It was his idea before it was mine. I simply acted on it, is all. Finally, I have intermittently helped Rick McDowell with his Fall of Rome and Alamaze forums and websites. I'm not really involved too much with Rick's stuff, anymore, though.

After I finally decided on the name for the new magazine, which actually only occurred just a couple of days before the previously mentioned deadline that I missed loomed large before me, the name, itself, conjured up memories of comic books - another long-standing love of mine.

Specifically, those old suspense, mystery, and horror type comic books. Hence, why those poor

fellows that adorn the cover of issue # 1 have the look on their respective faces that they have. The object of the front cover of issue # 1 was to achieve visual impact and to convey a sense and a feeling of suspense.

The artist for issue # 1's front cover was awarded the task of drawing the cover from scratch only a few hours ahead of the by-now much-lamented deadline. His effort and his results far exceeded the compensation that he received, in my considered opinion. A few days before the deadline, I had never even heard of the artist in question. Needless to say, even if you hate the name of this new PBM magazine, I hope that you will at least share my feeling that his effort to help us meet the deadline with the vague and limited set of instructions and guidance that he was given nonetheless rises to a level of effort that was just truly heroic. Kav, know that you have my eternal thanks for coming to the rescue at such a late hour of a process that you had no real control over nor say in.

To Mark Wardell, the Mad Scientist of PBM, know that you have my gratitude. This magazine may not bear the name of PBM Gamer, as you would have no doubt preferred, but rest assured, it will carry your mark for the duration of its existence.

To Carol Mulholland, I miss you. I am positive that I am not alone when I say that. Truly, I mean it. You did a yeoman's job - and then some, and you did it with a barebones and often-AWOL crew. You have every right to be proud. Flagship magazine sailed the storm-tossed seas of a much busier PBM era. Ever shall you, Carol Mulholland, remain a crown jewel in the annals of play by mail gaming history. I commend you. I salute you. Indeed, I admire you! For this new PBM magazine, though, I decided to chart a different course, but one that was heavily influenced by you, nonetheless.

And to David Webber, who unfortunately is no longer among us as he once was, your spirit remains strong in our midst, even as your influence upon and across the PBM industry and play by mail hobby are beyond contestation. I never met you. I never knew you, personally. But, I can honestly confess that you were, and are, and shall ever remain a polestar by which to guide

one's own meager attempt at a PBM magazine. It is to you, David Webber, that I am the most indebted, and it is a debt that can never truly be paid in full. Your finger was ever upon the pulse of all things play by mail. All these many years later, I sympathize greatly with the plight that you faced, anew, with each issue in sequence. If ever there was one deserving of the title of King of PBM, surely, it is you who held the strongest claim to that crown.

Last, but not least, of all, to Elaine Webber, I have no way to quantify your contributions. God knows that there's nary a record of it to be found. But, all that time, you were there by David's side. You raised a family, together, but you also raised a much larger family of PBM gamers and play by mail moderators - one that spanned the world, itself! If there is a Mother of PBM, it is you. Without you, I have no reason to believe that David would have accomplished even a remote fraction of what he achieved with Paper Mayhem. His right hand man was a woman. I thank you for the legacy that you left, even if you are no longer an active participant in the very industry and hobby that you helped to build. A PBM Amazon, you are! God bless you, wherever you are! My very best to you and your family, from afar.

To our new and budding readership, we have arrived. Bear with us, feel free to join us, and stay with us on this journey into the future of PBM

gaming that we, with this first issue, set a course for.

I dare say that I can feel the suspense building, already. Surely, decision lies ahead.

Suspense & Decision.

That's us. Welcome aboard!



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Where We're Heading...

Rather than back to the future, we're headed forward into the past.

The truth is, of course, that we're just trying to get off the launching pad, to get out of port. The wild blue yonder is still ahead of us, as it will likely ever be, but for the moment, we're just trying to cobble together this life raft of digital print, so that we can cast ourselves out onto the Sea of Uncertainty that is, was, and always will be play by mail gaming.

To be certain, while postal gaming fanaticism flows through our veins, our actual gaming tastes and our enthusiasm for the future of our long-standing hobby, namely PBM gaming, engenders within us a healthy respect and an abundance of appreciation for a wide berth of turn-based gaming.

As we head from issue # 1 toward issue # 2, the bulk of what we will write and what we will report on remains firmly off in the distance ahead of us. Our eventual destination will likely be something akin to PBM gaming from the past meets turn-based gaming of the future. The real question, to me, is whether we will even recognize this proverbial Isle in the Mists of Time, if and when we cross the equator of what it is that we pursue.

Our first issue is a bit on the sedate side. We are a crude

creation whose unifying force is a common interest that harkens back to a bygone era – the golden heyday of play by mail gaming.

Rather than a time machine, what we are building is more along the lines of a memory-mobile. Going forward, we will continuously be tweaking this vehicle, in order to increase its horsepower and range of interest. We're not trying to reach the entire world, just you – just each and every one of you out there that is looking, and yearning, for something more from a gaming experience.

In recent years, we have all seen the wonderful enhancements to gaming made possible by technological advancement. One thing that I hope to accomplish, that I have set as a personal goal for myself, where this new magazine is concerned, is to build a better bridge to gaming's past.

Gaming, itself, spans many different genres of play and many different mediums of delivery of the gaming experience to the player.

Technology will continue to evolve, and to inflict itself upon gamers and gaming, for better or for worse. It is a driving force for change, and as we have all seen over the course of our respective lifetimes, change can be both a good thing and a thing that is not so good – at least, as

far as how it impacts our gaming interests at the individual level.

Our gaming interests expand and contract, regardless of how fast or how far that technology pushes us towards where it intends to take us.

Even still, our gaming interests remain ever-grounded in the reality of our individual, respective experiences – experiences that always keep us chained to the past, to the games and to the gaming experiences that we learned to appreciate and to cherish.

Sometimes, bigger or faster or flashier in our gaming experiences does not always or necessarily equate to better.

At the core root of PBM gaming, a strong sense of community has always been the axis around which the postal genre of gaming has revolved.

So, it is with a sharp eye toward the concept of community in gaming that I take the helm of this new magazine that seeks to carve out its own place on the gaming scene, amid all that has come before us, and all which shall inevitably come after us.

Suspense & Decision – We're not the first PBM magazine, but we are here at long last. We have arrived. Welcome to our journey.

www.PlayByMail.net



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