

# Suspense & Decision

**PBM: The Old Ones of Gaming and the Internet**

**\* Duel2 \* Hyborian War \* Fallen Empires \***

**\* The Glory of Kings \* Alamaze \* Phoenix: BSE \***

**\* Ultima Online \***

**\* Midgard UK \***

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**SUBMISSION DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS NOVEMBER 20TH, 2015!**

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# SUSPENSE & DECISION ISSUE # 11

October 2015  
Happy Halloween!!

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*Hopefully, you had a wonderful Halloween. If any of our readers have photos of themselves dressed up in costumes for the occasion, be sure to send them in, so that other readers can enjoy them. If nothing else, send in photos of your jack-o'-lanterns and yard haunts. We would love to see them!*

*If you've been thinking about sending in an article or a review, be sure to get that in for our next issue, Issue #12. For our current issue, the one that you hold in your digital hands, I had our cover artist create a back cover for this issue, also. Let us know which cover art that you enjoyed the most, front or back.*

*Just as we, the magazine's staff, have to get back into the full swing of things, following our magazine's hiatus, I suspect that some of you have to get back into the swing of submitting content, be you game moderators or readers.*

*Other big holidays are just ahead, and this forthcoming time of year can get hectic for many. Try to stay as stress-free, as possible, and don't let it all get to you. Enjoy life, and enjoy this issue!*

**– Charles**



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**Hyborian War - Duel2 - and Forgotten Realms play-by-mail games**

# Victory for Hyborian War

## The Key to Winning

David Aldag (Olorin)

Victory Conditions are the key to winning Hyborian War.

*"Who cares?", you say, "I'll just conquer everything!"* The sad part is, we have seen Kingdoms of over 100 Provinces that lost the game. They came in 2nd or 3rd, but someone else had more Victory Points and won.

Every Kingdom is assigned Victory Conditions that determine how well you are doing in the game. The problem is that nobody knows how it works. It is an esoteric system that does not allow you to see what, if anything, contributes to your victory, other than a statement at the end of your initial Kingdom information which tells you what Victory Conditions govern your Kingdom. So, we have to understand those, to have a better chance of winning.

Each Kingdom also has Imperial Goals, provinces that, if you conquer them, gain you Imperial Troops (2 different unique troops for each Kingdom, totaling 10 troops) and an extra army. I don't believe Imperial Goals grant any Victory Points outside of what they would normally be. This is because some provinces are mentioned as both an Imperial Goal and as part of a 'major progress' from a #2 Victory Condition (see below). Since they are

mentioned as both, they are obviously differentiated in the game.

All of these are to 'balance' the game. How else could a small Kingdom compete with Turan and Aquilonia? Going head to head would pretty much result in the same few Kingdoms winning over and over again. The Imperial Goals are set-up to cause conflicts between Kingdoms. The Victory Conditions are there to create different paths for each Kingdom to achieve being #1.

There are a total of 9 different Victory Conditions. Every Kingdom has 2 of them, except for Pictland (with 3) and Kambulja (with 1, and probably a second). Each VC (Victory Condition) should award Victory Points (VP), how many for each is unknown. You probably also get VP for conquering provinces. The probability is, it is less than for any of your Victory Conditions.

Typically, the computer looks at how well you are doing at the Victory Conditions of your Kingdom at the start of your turn, and adds the points to your total. It compares the point totals of all the Kingdoms, and ranks them. It does list the top ten each turn (after the third Peace Years). It will, sometimes, tell you your allies' rank, and your spies pick up others. It never tells you your own

ranking! (Hint: Ask an ally.)

With all that being said, here are the 9 Victory Conditions:

**“The victory of your kingdom will depend upon the number of provinces under your control.”**

The most straightforward of conditions. Most likely figured as a percentage relative to the number of Provinces you held at the start. Thus, small Kingdoms (with 1 province to start) have it easier than a large Kingdom (with 6 or more) to gain points with this.

**“Makes major progress towards victory by controlling:”**

Specific provinces. Typically four.

I would assume that these are either a VP add for each under control in a turn, or a multiplier applied to total VP earned that turn. Knowing RSI, it is likely some form of multiplier, like .1 or .2 for each province, or 1 divided between the provinces required. Thus, 1.1 or 1.2 times total VP earned that turn.

**“You will move closer to victory by fostering the amount of wealth contained in your kingdom's treasury.”**

Pretty straightforward, as well. The more you can keep your treasury in Superior status, the more VP you earn. The only

time it seems to really hurt, is when it drops to 'None' treasury.

**“You will move closer to victory by increasing and fostering the economic strength of your kingdom. You may do this by conquering new and rich provinces, protecting your trade routes, and seeing to the prosperity and productivity of your kingdom.”**

This is the first multi-part VC we have seen, so far. There are four parts to this, let's break them down:

**A) Increasing the economic strength of the Kingdom:**

This is both straightforward and obscure, at the same time. Look at the wealth production of your original provinces, add those together, and that is your base economic strength. It might be easier to give them a scale to work with. Let's say Poor = 1, Superior = 5. You start with 3 superior, which is 15. Conquer 3 Poor provinces but lose one of your starting. You drop 2 economic strength and need to pick up at least three to get any VP for this part. See how that works?

**B) Conquering new and rich provinces:**

Unlike #1 above, you care about the wealth production of your new provinces. A Superior province gets

you more VP than a Poor one. How many more? No real idea, but how many you have of each gets mentioned, if you win, so it is important. Most likely, a small multiplier, starting at 1 for Poor going to 1.5 for Superior.

### **C) Seeing to the prosperity and productivity of your kingdom.**

This one is a little hard to judge. The easiest way to see if you are doing well is to look at the wealth production every four turns or so, and compare it to the base wealth production. Steps like having your Monarch Actively Ruling and casting Bless spells can help some.

### **D) Protecting your Trade Routes.**

This is interesting. There is only one spot where a trade route exists. They end in a Kingdom, so they always go there, even if the Kingdom is in exile. So, you can't protect their end. At no point do they run along the surface, to be intercepted between. So, the only place they really exist is at the trade route start. To protect it requires that you conquer the province in which it starts, and prevent anyone from raiding it. A very tall order.

Luckily, the computer only looks to see if you own it and if nobody has raided it. If both of those register, you get VP.

**“You will move closer to victory by conquering home provinces of any large kingdom. Should the Ice Age come, your people**

**may decide to migrate to the lands of a single large kingdom at that time. You should then focus your efforts on that kingdom's home provinces.”**

A couple of things to note about this: It does not say 'after the Ice Age starts' for conquering large kingdom provinces. You get VP, anytime. Also, note the two 'shoulds.' It does not say you will gain any VP, just that you should focus on them. It is most likely an effect on morale or fighting spirit, rather than any gain in VP to attack those provinces.

**“You will move closer to victory by controlling provinces which you conquer from other kingdoms.”**

This VC doesn't care if you keep your home provinces! It only cares if you are keeping a province you conquered from another player. So, you have to conquer and then keep the province for at least another turn, for it to count. The more you do that for, the more VP you get. It doesn't say whether or not non-player kingdoms count. That is still being worked out. There are 35 Player-Kingdoms in the game, besides you. There are 34 Non-player Kingdoms in addition. Lots of room to check that with!

**“You will move closer to victory by conquering and controlling**



## **the initial capital provinces of player kingdoms.”**

Again, that 'controlling' clause. You must capture and keep the capital province. That controlling part is the hard part. Once you take it, you have to hold it for at least one turn to acquire the VP. Of course, each turn after that gives you VP. as well. but the first couple of turns can be real difficult, as most players will counterattack for the capital.

**“You will move closer to victory by increasing and fostering the economic strength of your kingdom through its provinces. You may do this by conquering new provinces and seeing to the prosperity and productivity of the ones you now control.”**

This one is often seen as the same as #4, above. It is not. Really. It is completely different. This one is composed of two parts.

**A) Conquer new provinces. Couldn't care less how rich they are, just conquer provinces. Much closer to #1 than #4.**

**B) See to the prosperity and productivity of the ones you now control.**

Make sure the provinces you start with produce better than normal. If you are doing a step better at harvest (fall turns

and Peace Years), then you are likely fulfilling this one. Say the average wealth production for a home province is Good, you want the harvest to be Excellent. Steps like Actively Ruling home provinces and casting Bless spells can help some. Which also means you HAVE to hold onto your original provinces. They produce worse for YOU, if they are held by someone else.

**“ You will lose much towards victory if the following neighboring nations lose control of these home provinces:”**

The anti-victory condition, as it is referred to. You lose VP, if these provinces are taken by anyone, including you. There IS a way to avoid the loss. To continue the quote: “However, if someone else takes your neighbor's provinces, you may champion his provinces and conquer them for him.” Which means, if they are taken by someone else FIRST, you get VP for taking them back. You only keep the loss, if YOU take them first rather than someone else, because you can't champion against yourself.

There are a few interesting exceptions to general statements. Khitai only needs three provinces for 'major progress' VP, but one is very far away. Pictland has three VC, instead of two. A 'major progress' for capturing Westermarck (and bonus VP for taking a large

kingdom province), as well as two 'regular' VC.

Kambulja is the only kingdom with only one VC. The caveat of that is there is likely an anti-VC that is no longer mentioned, but is in effect, anyway. I believe it is for 301, 302, 303 and 304. Most likely, Kambulja can champion them, as well. The fact that it is no longer printed just adds one more difficulty for anyone playing Kambulja.

There is also the Exile option, where you play a Kingdom after it has lost all provinces. From other games, I have seen an Exiled Kingdom, dropped in mid-game, that outranked played Kingdoms at game's end. So, Exile does NOT cost you Victory Points. What it likely does do, is freeze your points gain. So you earn 0 points while in Exile, which can drop you relatively to others, but costs you none of your earned Victory Points, unless you suffer from an anti-VC (#9).

Hopefully, all of this has helped you to understand better what is needed to win a game of Hyborian War.

*"What is good in life? To crush your enemies! To drive them before you! To hear the lamentation of their women!"*

Good luck.

## Do you remember?



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# **PBM: The Old Ones of Gaming and the Internet**

## **Harkening Back to an Earlier Time**

**Charles Mosteller**

These days, Internet gaming is prevalent. Gaming comes in a wide variety of different flavors, and the Internet makes gaming easily accessible. Countless different games of virtually any genre that you can imagine are right at your fingertips, regardless of which device type that you are partial to for accessing the Internet.

PBM gaming, where you send turn orders and receive turn results via the postal service, harkens back to an earlier time, to an earlier generation.

The Internet has made possible many things that are gaming related. This magazine is just one of them.

Compared to the Internet games of today, Play By Mail games are the Old Ones of Gaming.

They are ancient. They strike a 140 character limit Twitter generation as unfathomable. For that matter, why even give them a second thought, in this day and age? The Internet has given them a new pantheon of games. What use, has the world, for the Old Ones, anymore?

Of late, it seems, the Old Ones have been stirring. Numerous games from the heyday of PBM gaming's past have

begun reappearing. Word spreads slowly in some corners of the gaming cosmos, even with Internet access widely available in this day and age.

Nonetheless, it does spread, just the same.

The Old Ones will drive you crazy - if you let them. Dated rulebooks. Archaic turn fees. Set-up fees to be dreaded.

Missed turns. Maintenance turns. Player dropouts.

The parade of horrors is seemingly without end. Yet, as anyone who remembers them can tell you, as anyone who still plays them can attest, these horrors, while not quite unspeakable, have their ways of taking a toll on your gaming soul.

It has been said that with the dawn of the Internet, PBM gaming was rendered obsolete. But, since when is good, old



fashioned fun rendered obsolete, just because new technology came along?

PBM games, because they involve other players - other human beings - are invariably about more than just games. They involve communication. They tend to be hotbeds of human interaction. They are social networks, of their own rather unique sort.

The reason that people played them in the first place, and the reason that some people have continued to play them for years - *even decades* - after they first started playing them, is because they are first-rate instruments of fun.

Gaming is many different things to many different people, but gaming has a common denominator. That denominator is entertainment.

Anticipation does not become obsolete. Delving into one's own imagination, in order to fully embrace the gaming experience, never grows old. Playing PBM games, even in the era of the Internet, is about more than just waxing nostalgic. *It's about fun!*

It's also about enlarging one's circle of friends, and about embracing new challenges. It is a test of wits, and a sharing of a common bond, a shared feeling that the experience of playing the game is greater than the game, itself - no matter what game is being played.

Plotting and scheming in PBM games never grows old, because when you get right down to it, because gaming with other kindred souls yields a bountiful

harvest of camaraderie through entertainment by way of gaming.

The Old Ones of Gaming still stir, even now, because they still generate lots of fun for those that partake of them, for those that embrace them, for those that dare to undertake the road to gaming adventure that play by mail games stand ever-prepared to visit upon them.

The Internet wasn't invented to destroy PBM gaming. It wasn't sent to annihilate gaming in the postal realm. What it did do, however, was unleash vast amounts of creative thought, untold amounts of creative gaming interest, both by designers and by players.

The very same creative energies and creative juices that made PBM games possible to begin with simply multiplied beyond the ability of anyone to count and to keep track of.

'Tis true that PBM games preceded the Internet, but that doesn't mean that the Internet has yet worked its full magic upon games played by mail. PBeM games and games playable via a Web-based interface have their own strengths, to be

certain, but they also have their own weaknesses, as well.

PBM games, the old fashioned kind, have always tended to be expert mechanisms for visiting anticipation upon players. Even today, many years after the Internet first took hold, Internet-playable games are hard-pressed to match the ability of games played via the postal service to build - and maintain - that sense of anticipation.

That's because PBM games were - and are - true masters of the art of time management in game design. The postal medium, with its built-in delays, proved rather advantageous to PBM Game designers. They have been trying to 'overcome' this advantage for years on end. They've searched for a technological Holy Grail for years on end, when it's been hidden in plain sight all along. Their bird in the hand was worth two birds in the technological bush, after all, it seems.

Various PBM games have survived the coming and the entrenchment of the Internet within society. They haven't all taken the same path, so that tells me that there's more than one path to survival, when faced off against the technological behemoth that is the Internet.

What is the key to prosperity, though?

Define prosperity.

Is it something that is to be defined in very narrow terms, such as in the context of dollars and cents?

If you're a game company, then money probably factors into your whole equation of prosperity. Diversification can help your company survive, even when your games can't. A change of direction can right a sinking ship, at times.

Every PBM company is different. Every PBM game is different. Every game's path to success is different. Success that spans the societal transition to the Internet, is proving to be very different, as well. Just embracing technology does not automatically a winner make. There's more to cooking up success than just ingredients and a recipe.

The Old Ones of Gaming still beckon unto me. They whisper my name. They lurk, even still, in the shadows of my thoughts.

What's a fellow like me to do, I ask you?

Well, this fellow decided, at some point rather far along the way, to start up a PBM magazine, of all things.

*Blame it on the Old Ones!*

We can talk about turn-based gaming and about episodic gaming all day long, and those are fine things to talk about. No doubt about it. But, make no mistake, I'm here, and this magazine is here, because the Old Ones of Gaming still stir in our midst.

If you should ever find yourself reading

this magazine, then don't be so quick to dismiss the Old Ones as nothing more than myth or dust.

They're very real - *and they're out there!*

Just biding their time. Just waiting. Just lurking under the disguise of belonging to a false perception - the perception that PBM games are obsolete. The true reality is that play by mail gaming is still fun, as fun as it has ever been.

Whether they're waiting for me, or whether they're waiting for you, matters little to them, I suspect.

You don't even have to believe in them. Whether you choose to believe or not believe that games can or should still be played via the postal service does not preclude others from still enjoying them on a regular and recurring basis.

Me? Oh, I definitely believe in them! Hell, I've seen their power at work. I've felt their magic. I've long been a prisoner to their designs.

Perhaps you are stronger than I am, though. Perhaps your will to resist them is greater than mine proved to be.

Or, maybe you're just fooling yourself.

Maybe you're just one of the lucky ones that were spared, through no fault of your own.

Maybe you're not up to the challenge.

Maybe you were never cut out for walking to your mailbox, and finding something in it other than bills.

## The Diplomatic Pouch



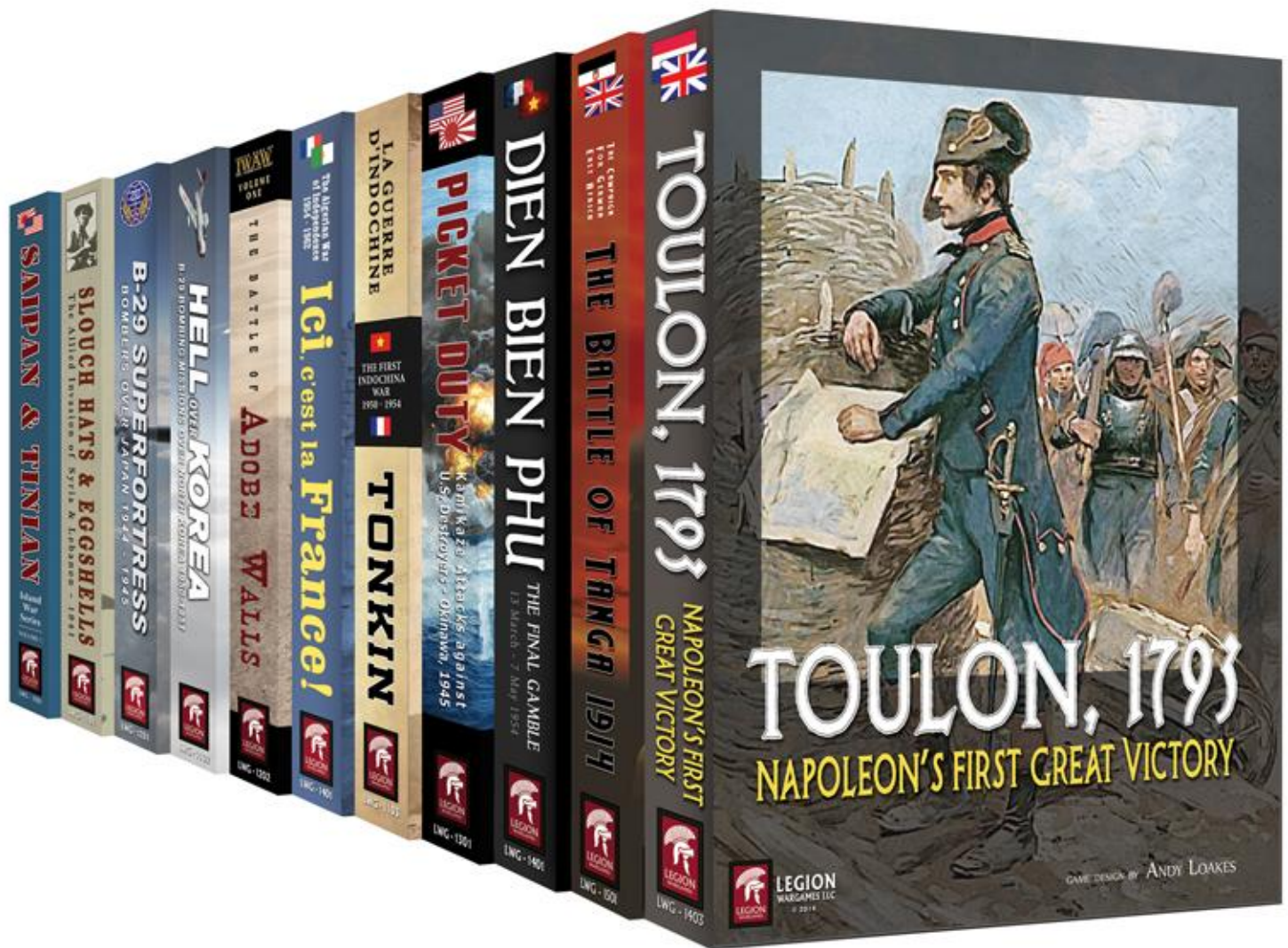




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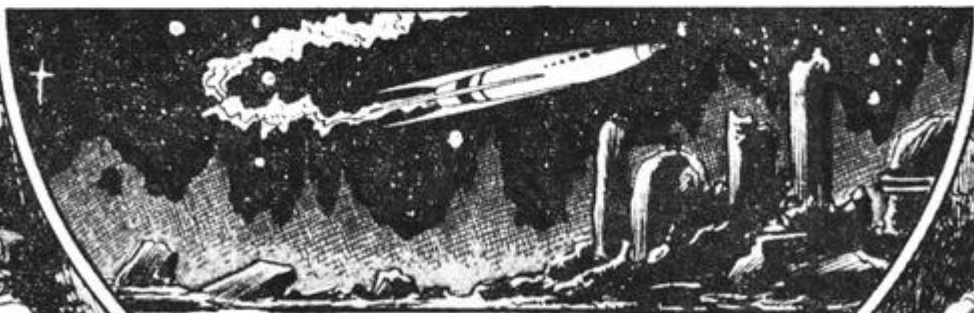




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of your  
Fathers**

# The Midgard Independent

## Digging Through the Kemeny Files

Jim Kemeny

**Note from Jim: This is a one-off broadsheet that was on my Google Drive. But, it gives something of the feel for this superb game, Midgard UK, that Stephen Weir devised and ran for some years that Medieval Inspirations has taken on.**

### The Midgard Independent Issue 1

Every newly-formed clan sets out with a legacy that provides the resources to make the clan free and independent, beholden to no overlord or faction. Yet, most clan leaders taste their freedom but briefly. Faced with leadership in the harsh world, the great majority hasten to declare for a faction. Few clans attempt - even briefly - to stay independent and fight to defend the legacy of freedom their inheritance empowers them with.

This broadsheet starts out as a way for me to make public the events I and my kin are becoming involved in. I thought long and hard, before deciding that the advantages of openness outweigh potential disadvantages. What decided me was a sense that the war between Ring and Blood & Fire was spreading from Northwest Seabreeze to northeast Frostmarch, where Blood & Fire have a city, and that other factions may start

taking an interest, drawn by the chance to profit from the fighting.

But quite apart from this, keeping independent, able to co-operate with all factions, having MercVerk and Society of Arms as allies, and walking the tightrope of armed neutrality is a challenge in its own right. It is my hope that the other clans who have chosen the roads to freedom of an independent clan will contribute their experiences by sending them to my scribe for inclusion in future issues of The Midgard Independent. How much information you provide is your choice, but a province name as the contribution's heading would be a good way to organise such copy.

(Signed) Gypsy Mae, Leader of Clan Reynard, Kiejow, February 2009

### **Frostmarch Province** **Kiejow and Pleyat**

These two cities in Northeast Frostmarch remain independent under elected councils. The independent clan known as The Free Company has recently arrived in Pleyat. As a junior cousin clan of Reynard, it will work hand-in-hand with Reynard to preserve the existing independent order in these two cities. We have no ambitions to expand our territories, nor even to replace the

elected city councils with clan leader dictatorships.

### **The War between Ring and Blood & Fire**

Clan Reynard finds itself in the middle of a faction war between Ring and Blood & Fire. Fighting seems to have been so far restricted to Northwest Seabreeze Province, especially in the vicinity of the Quatran ruins, but also further south, near the Ring city of Fimvale.

Gypsy Mae wishes it to be known that she is in contact with both parties, and has made clear that Reynard intends to stay neutral in this war. In addition, Clan Reynard's good offices are available for mediation, and with both factions having representation on the independent council of Reynard's home city of Kiejow, she suggests this as a suitable neutral place to hold discussions leading to a peaceful settlement.

### **Negotiations over Ring temple-building in Kiejow and Pleyat**

The Castelan has indicated an interest in building Ring temples in both cities. Gypsy Mae pointed out that Ring already have a temple in Kiejow, as well as a seat on the city council, so she was not able to recommend further Ring temple expansion in Kiejow. The situation in Pleyat is quite different, where there are only Blood & Fire and Cult of Dark Order temples, and where the independent councillors now only have a bare

majority on the city council. For these reasons, a Ring temple would be welcome there. We understand a Ring clan will be sent there to do this task.

### **MercHaus Construction**

Given the recent war between Ring and Blood & Fire in Northwest Seabreeze, Gypsy Mae has been concerned that Ring sending a clan to Pleyat to build a temple should not lead to spreading the war to this independent city. Therefore, she here makes public her intention to defend the independence of Pleyat, and to this end, has approached both cities, as well as the MercVerk Supreme Commander, for permission and tasking-support provided by Clan Reynard and The Free Company to build a MercHaus in both Kiejow and Pleyat. The request has been approved, and construction has begun. Gypsy Mae has also agreed to hiring for a goodly sum a MercVerk clan to come to Pleyat, that just by its presence and help with constructing the MercHaus will do much to reduce the tension between Ring and Blood & Fire that threatened to spread the conflict to Frostmarch.

### **Blood & Fire and the Kiejow Soup Kitchen**

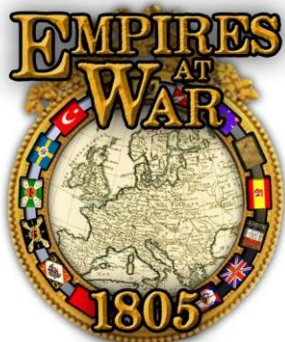
Thanks to Clan Reynard's attack on the Wolfskin Savage's base in the Qaale ruins of Northeast Frostmarch (see the Battle Report "Rescue at Qaale"), the Wolfskins abandoned the ruins and moved away, and have ceased their

raids. As a result, the flood of refugees to Kiejow from the raids (see MR#1, 2 & 4) has ended, and the clan has been caring for those still destitute by providing free bowls of hot grain broth, on request, at our street kitchen. This quickly attracted the intense interest of three priests from the local Blood and Fire Temple, who used the soup kitchen as a place to distribute blankets and footwear, demonstrating both their charitable focus and their grass roots contact. Demand for hot broth has fallen, as refugees settled down in the city, but Gypsy Mae is now looking to establish longer-term co-operation with Blood & Fire, with its famed care for the poor, to co-ordinate our separate care efforts for the poor of the Independent cities of Northeast Frostmarch.

### **Public Notices**

(contact Gypsy Mae's scribe)

Gypsy Mae seeks contact with Senior # 1 of the Cult of the Dark Order, and/or a Cult clan, preferably in or near Frostmarch, in relation to the growing area of dying forest her rangers have discovered.





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# IT'S TIME TO PLAY WITH HISTORY.

**THIS ISSUE: Renaissance wars between the Italian city-states**

ISSUE 81

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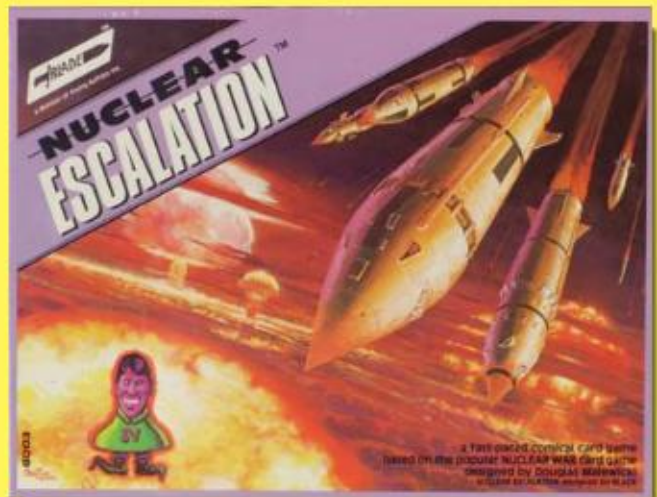
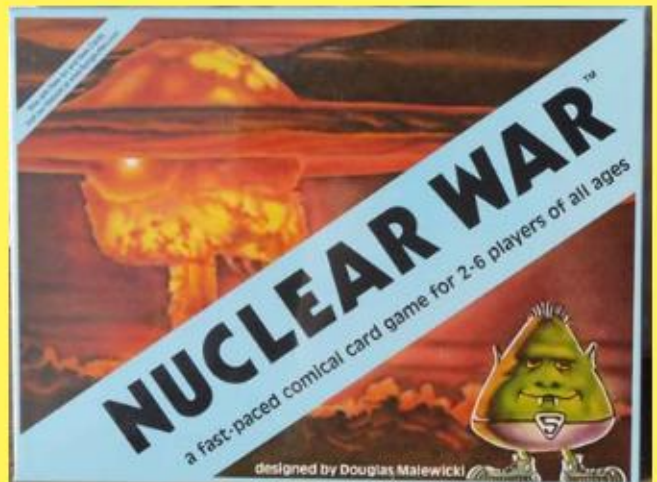
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# GALAC-TAC...

ACTION INPUT SHEET  
Player account #108 for Edward F. M.

EMPIRE NAME	1. GREAT DOA	
Action	Argument #1	Argu
1. BUILD	23-64	1
2. BUILD	23-64	5
3. CHART	1503	2
4. COLONIZE	1003	3
5. ATTACK	4017	
6. JOIN	4103	
7. SCOUT	1505	
8. SECURE	3118	
9. LOAD	1010	
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		



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# Ridin' Out the Storm

## A Galac-Tac Chronicle - Episode 2

Douglas Neman

### **Weather Report: 3500-02**

Well, that was a fun-filled two days. Rex and I yelled at each other, I don't even remember what for. He throws a bottle of beer at me, I dodge, the bottle hits the food dispenser and shatters, and beer gets into the circuitry. We then spend the next two days repairing the freakin' thing, starving because we can't get any food.

Why did it take two days? Funny you should ask.

Neither of us took any electronics courses, so we pulled out the manual, only to discover it was written in Ancient Fundarian. Or, maybe it was Norellian. Maybe it was Elvish. Hell if I know. It was so useless, that Rex dumped it into space, and we begged Central Command to send us a repair video.

So, Central Command sent us a video of Snot-Nose's coronation. We deleted it and requested the repair video, again. They sent us the latest episode of Dancin' With the Admirals. We deleted it, and requested the repair video, again. They sent us a video teaching us how to read Ancient Fundarian. We sent back a message worded so strongly that subspace in this part of the galaxy melted. They finally sent us the video showing us how to repair the food

dispenser.

And remember, it takes hours for each of these communications to get through. By the time we finally fixed the thing, we were wondering if we could eat the wiring.

Then, I got a message from Shelandra, saying that she had been assigned as a port gunner on Admiral Brighton's flagship, the Heir Apparent. (Yes, that's its real name.)

She's a gunner on the flagship. I'm the pilot of an unarmed throwaway vessel called Scout 1. Why didn't they just name our ship the Expendable Dirtbags? Or maybe Hey Come Shoot Me I'm A Sitting Duck? I lay curled up in my bunk, and got drunk.

The next morning, Rex came to get me. We'd reached our destination. It wasn't a planet full of hot babes and cold beer. It was an uninhabited swamp pit. The survey bots reported that it would produce about six PV per fortnight. We relayed the data, and CC gave us another star system.

I thought about running for it. I really did. Just turn off the transponder, cut all communication, and get lost. But then, who would help us fix our food dispenser?

Besides, there's nowhere to run to. According to the news reports, the whole galaxy is now in a state of war. All the treaties have dissolved, and every empire is accusing every other empire of stabbing it in the back. Everyone's trying to get as much real estate as possible. It really looks like it will be a case of Last Empire Standing. Everyone is our enemy.

There's nowhere safe. Nowhere at all.

So, we punch it for the next star system, just tryin' to ride out the storm.

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# Fallen Empires

## Marchwood – Life And Times

### C. Danks

*Marchwood* was my first position in *Fallen Empires*. It's a settlement style position in the world of *Clantium*. Although tribe positions can move around the map, I've always liked the idea of growing a bare settlement to where it is today.

For those who do not know *Fallen Empires* (and why not), it is played on a nicely laid out map, where each sector contains terrain and a basic description which is given to you.

This description you receive, when you either have your army move to it, or when you scout the area. Each turn, you receive a Word document (which is free style) and an Excel spreadsheet (which is the mechanics of your position).

The Word document is where the fun begins. For *Marchwood*, you are allowed to carry out a major action and 2 minor actions, to help grow the settlement. *Marchwood* is a settlement in the south of the world perched on a mountain cliff, and starts with basic troop types, basic defences and low power weapons and

armour. The population is low, and so is the gold income. Your job is to manage the settlement. Do you use your free actions and resources to grow your army, to grow your settlement or try to juggle between the two?

Now, you are not alone! The population is split, with 2/3rds being military and 1/3rd being civilian (don't ask me how the economy would work in real life, but for the game, it works well!). For the military side, you have specialists which you recruit, and are the building blocks for the army. These specialists (Men at Arms, Weaponsmiths, Armourers and some positions have Master Engineers) all contribute 20 cp points, each, to their section. However, you are limited to the number of specialists you can recruit, depending on your population. Grow your population, and therefore, you can increase the number of specialists.

The Men at Arms are your powerhouse for your settlement, the other specialists make things, really. If you have 20 Men at Arms, you have (20 x 20cp) 400 cp points to spend every turn. You can recruit extra population, convert basic manpower to skilled workers (more of this later) or you can spend the points to train your basic warriors to Archers, Officers, Cavalry, etc.. 5 cp points will train your warrior to become an archer,

to train an Officer costs 10cp, so you can see that your 200cp can be spent quickly on different skill sets.

This is done neatly on the Excel spreadsheet. You just need to allocate the points, and the spreadsheet does the rest.

**You can spend a lot of time playing with the points, until you are happy with the allocation, before you need to save the spreadsheet.**

However, as I said before, the troop types are all basic. The way to grow your army is to use the Word document, and use these actions. A minor action allows you to add a new troop type to your mix. As long as you give a reasonable explanation, the GM is generally quite understanding. I have bodyguards bonded with monkeys, which might sound silly, but if you think about it, why not!

The weaponsmiths and armourers do exactly what their names suggest. It costs resources and cp points to make items (a leather shield costs 3 leather and 5cp per shield to make). You can only make what you know. If your guys have never seen a metal shield, then how can they manufacture one? You have to complete a minor action, to allow these guys to design a metal shield (this

could take you 4 turns before you can mass produce them).

Resources, you buy at the local villages and cost you gold. Gold, you get via taxation from your population. Population, you need to grow via your Men at Arms cp points. However, you want to increase your army and need these points.....*vicious circle!* One of the best plans is to grow your population to maximum size quickly, and therefore, you can have the maximum amount of specialists and gold income to play around with.

You also have non-military specialists (Mason, Foreman, Stockman, Craftsman and Shipbuilder - if near the sea). These work in the same way as the military specialists, and help towards building your settlement stronger. [*i.e.:* (Masons), *gathering material for projects* (Foremen), *controlling and improving your herds* (Stockmen), *selling items for gold* (Craftsmen) or *to build ships* (shipbuilder).]

Again, these guys know the basics, and it's up to you to use your minor/major actions to improve their knowledge. Most of the time, you also need manpower to allow your Foreman/Manson to build. For example, if you want to build a better gate for your settlement, it might cost you 10cp, 20 stone, 10 wood and 20 workers. Sometimes, you have more cp points that you can spend, as you have limited manpower (well, stop building your army size up, and spend some powers on skilled workers, instead).

I'll give you one example on how the whole game mechanic works with the actions (these pesky monkeys again!). I moved my army to a sector containing jungle terrain. The report came back from my scouts saying that there were strange animals, used as pets, located in the villages. I carried out a major action, looking for animals which I could bond with bodyguards (to protect my senior leadership). Now, I am buying monkeys every turn, to bond them with my bodyguards.

**There are also cities dotted around the land. Some are player controlled, others run by the GM.**

These cities offer you the chance to trade your hard-earned gold for weapons/armour, or to sell some special items which you have picked up on the way. Basically, you are given an Excel spreadsheet, and you buy what you need. Fairly simple, but the knack is to what to buy for use in your army.

There are other positions in the game which the GM can offer, depending on how much time (and money) you want to invest.

### **1. Land or Sea Tribe**

These tribes do not have a sector as their home, but travel from place to place to earn money and to explore the world

### **2. Land or Sea Mercenary Company:**

As above, but smaller positions which you can actually hire

### **3. Religious Positions**

These positions take time to grow, but they have a real kick, once they start maturing with their special abilities.

### **4. City**

You can start with a city which has an Army, City Guard and either a Navy or another Army, if not at the sea. This type of position takes more time, but is far one of the better positions to play.

If you wish to play any of the positions, drop the friendly GM an email, who will guide you through the process, as required.

**You can join an alliance with other players, or if you wish, you wander across the lands at your own pace, and enjoy the game as you please. The world is big enough.**

## **Fallen Empires:**

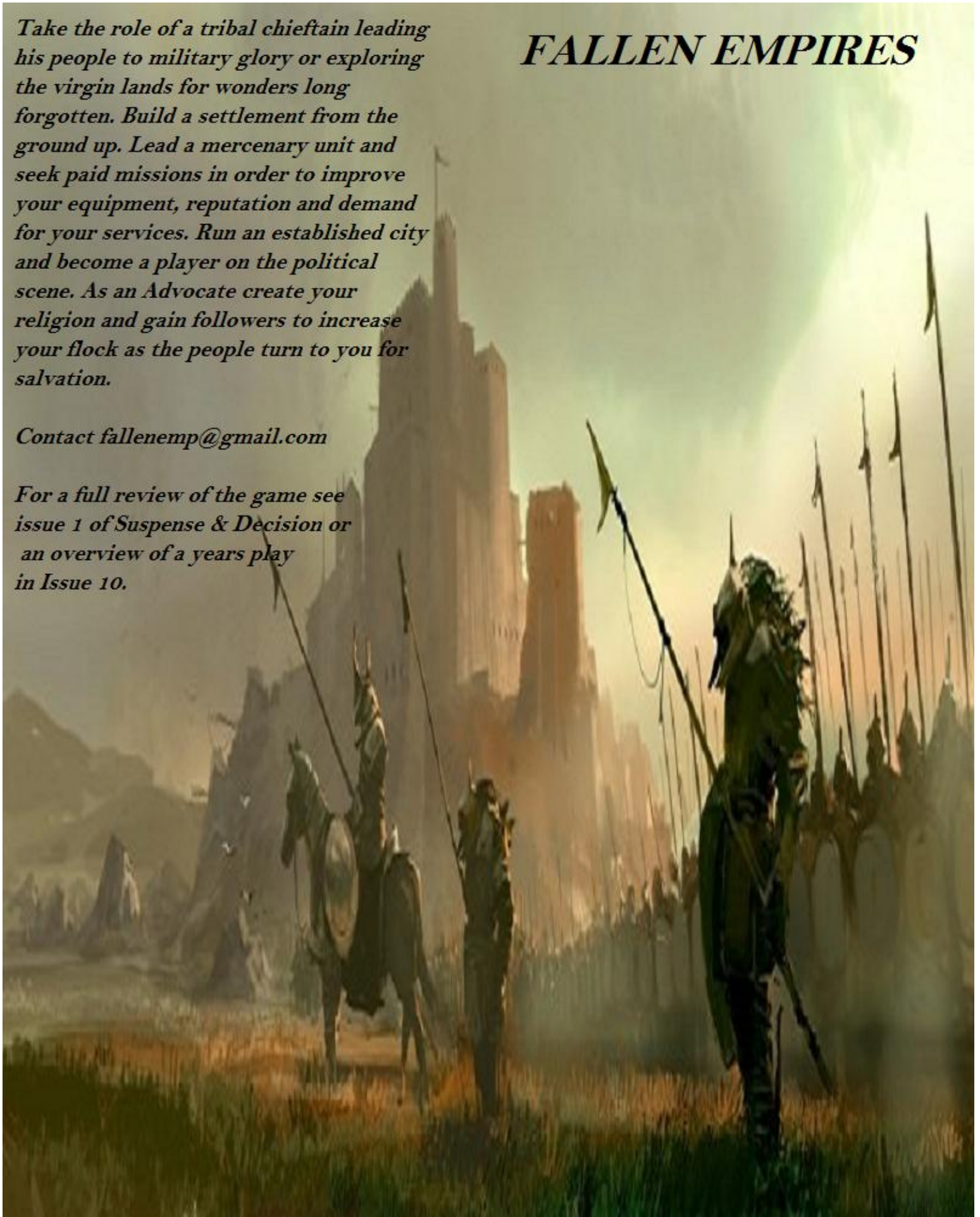
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# ***FALLEN EMPIRES***

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*Contact [fallenemp@gmail.com](mailto:fallenemp@gmail.com)*

*For a full review of the game see issue 1 of *Suspense & Decision* or an overview of a years play in Issue 10.*







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# Secrets in the Sand

## A Tale from the World of Alamaze - Part 2

### Jumbie

#### Part 2 of 2

Each of the wyrms was about fifty feet long, glistening black, with horned heads upon twisting necks. They used their wings as weapons, the claws at the ends threatening dismemberment with each slash.

Their teeth were as long as hands, and stood in rows of a dozen, chomping through the air as the dragons attacked at odd angles, circling the rangers. The men's vision shimmered as the heat of the dragons' mouths boiled the air even without flame.

Drake pressed Leenah into the bedding and said, "*Keep hidden!*"

He rose to see Suroc racing suicidally at a nearby dragon. When the dragon lunged at Suroc, however, the man sidestepped it with inhuman speed and hung on to the creature's neck. With impossible strength, Suroc wrestled the beast's head to the ground and rolled it onto its back.

The other two dragons left the Rangers and ran at Suroc. Their necks whipped forward and they spewed orange fire, engulfing him and the other dragon. The conflagration scorched the ground, raising dust and black smoke that drifted out and obscured the fight.

Drake checked on Leenah. She was stone faced, trying to see out from under her cover.

The captain next looked for his men, but before he could find them all, a roar arose from the dragons' direction and one of the black creatures tumbled into the desert, over their heads, as if hurled. From within the wreathed smoke at the center of the fight, a massive figure stood, as tall as a dragon was long. The face was undoubtedly Suroc's, but had taken the look of white marble. Horns grew from the sides of his head, curving forward like those of a bull. Suroc's solid body seemed to dissolve below his chest into a column of twisting vapor.

One of the dragons bit into Suroc's forearm and the giant figure responded by punching it, breaking its grip. The dragon lunged right back, this time at the same time the other remaining dragon reached snapped upward at Suroc's neck. Suroc dodged the neck bite reflexively, but the other beast dragged him down by the elbow. Dust and smoke again obscured the fight.

The third dragon was turning back to the fight now from the west. Even such a colossal magical being as Suroc could not stand against three dragons. The captain called out to his men, "*Bows and spears! Grab everything you have.*" He saw

Jerrick leaning down to grab a quiver of arrows. Drake shouted, *"Sergeant, set up the bowmen thirty yards to the south. Send everyone else to help me block that dragon."*

*"Yes, Sir!"*

Picking up an 8-foot javelin, Drake faced the oncoming beast with four of his men alongside him in a line. The dragon was spreading its wings, preparing to fly over them and Drake brought his arm back. Just then, three arrows connected its wing almost simultaneously from the right as Jerrick's men let loose their first volley. The dragon curled his head at them, preparing to fling fire. But Drake's javelin plunged into it right behind the ear, sticking out the other side of the neck.

The dragon's roar became a giant gasp and the beast faltered, tripping over its legs and sliding along the sand on its side. More arrows flew at its exposed belly while Drake pulled his sword and charged at the neck.

But, even though it was wounded, the dragon was able to whip its head around and chomp into the torso of the ranger next to Drake. The man screamed as the dragon's powerful jaws drove its teeth through his armor. Drake lunged at the huge neck, near the shoulders, and hacked into it. The sword cut two blade-widths into the skin and flesh before stopping.

In response, the dragon spit out its victim and rolled in Drake's direction.

The captain avoided a being crushed with a desperate dive, then turned to face the standing dragon. A dozen arrows stuck out from its belly, the wounds dripping blood - - the bright, fiery-looking blood of dragons. Human blood, darker and thicker, coated the sides of the dragon's jaws.

But, the eyes were the worst - - Hellish embers that looked hypnotically at Drake. He felt the will go out of his arm as the dragon's head reared back and struck down at him. Someone thrust a spear into the dragon's ear and upset its aim. The side of the horned head still connected with the captain, sending him onto his back. He looked up to see Jerrick guarding him as the dragon skittered back.

Drake looked over at where the archers had been standing, then back at Jerrick.

*"We're out of arrows,"* said the sergeant, before turning back to the fight, sword in hand.

The Rangers charged the dragon from all sides, but even wounded and with its fire exhausted, the beast's claws, teeth and lashing tail were too much to overcome. Two more men died. Captain Drake struggled to get in close for a strike at the underside or neck, but a swipe or bite would make him back away before he could get close enough.

Then another dragon slammed into theirs, thrown by Suroc. The blow disoriented the creature on the bottom long enough for Jerrick to make a fatal

stab at its heart with the front end of a broken spear. It did not die right away, and yet another Ranger died before its fell over and stopped moving.

The dragon that had been thrown was limping away, one twisted wing dragging in the sand.

Behind them, Suroc roared and snapped the neck of his dragon as he held it in a vice grip. He looked over at the escaping third dragon and smiled, a hideous grin on his giant face. Suroc leapt high into the air, and came down upon the last dragon with all his weight behind his shoulder. An explosion of sand showered everywhere and Suroc was left standing with his knee on the dragon's neck: He had taken a prisoner.

- - - -

*"Are you still strong when you're normal sized?"* Drake asked.

Suroc had recovered this torn and singed robe. He was holding the dragon by the head, like an unruly horse, its snout wrapped tight with glistening silver chains that Suroc had summoned from his sleeves.

*"What makes you think this is my normal size?"* asked the pale man, amused.

*"Now I'm embarrassed that you saw me before I found my robe. I can't even use the excuse of cold weath-"*

*"Look, you know what I mean. I don't want this worm escaping."*

*"I'm not as strong in this form, but I'm strong enough."*

*"Good. Can you make him talk? There's a site out here that Leenah's been leading us to and maybe we can get him to describe their defenses to her and get an idea-"*

From deep within it's throat the dragon was laughing.

*"I suspect he rather wants to talk,"* said Suroc. *"The fire inside him will take a while to rekindle after the battle, so it will be safe."*

Drake called Leenah over. She had stayed hidden throughout the battle and was unhurt. *"I told you this man was a spy,"* she said, standing at Drake's side, away from Suroc and the dragon's teeth.

Suroc lifted his palms towards the dragon and the chains uncoiled on their own retreating into his sleeves.

*"What are you?"* Drake asked.

*"What's important is that-"*

Freed, the dragon spoke. *"He is the Demon prince Orcus, out seeking treasures in the sand."*

*"And you are General Xanix,"* said the pale man. *"Aren't you supposed to be hiding in a cave somewhere with Marshal Zethas?"*

*"The Marshal was curious as to why a lord of Hel was meddling in-"*

Drake said to Orcus, *"So everything you*



*told is is a lie? This was-*"

The dragon laughed again. *"The lies in this place are everywhere. For instance, captain, you have no doubt told this human child that you will rescue her grandfather, but you already know her grandfather is in the north with us. Our agents saw your soldier question the guards. We-*"

Leenah shouted at Drake, *"You were not going to rescue grandfather?"*

*"Your grandfather is a grown man,"* said Drake. *"He chose to lead them to a decoy site. I just-*"

*"Someone's been led to a decoy site,"* chuckled the dragon, *"but it was not us."*

*"You deceived us?"* Drake asked Leenah.

*"You lied first!"*

*"I am trying to stop a war. There are more important things than-*"

*"Yes,"* said Leena, her defiant nod sending a ripple through her smoothed-back hair. *"You need to go steal other people's things for your father."*

Drake wondered if that was the same look he had possessed back when he had thrown Trueblade's helmet into the sea.

*"He's not my father,"* Drake said.

*"Well then he's lucky!"*

Orcus spoke with anger for the first time. *"Leenah, why have you brought us out here!?"*

*"Us?"* said Drake. *"You are not part of this expedition. You deceived your way into our party and while I thank you for your aid, you are not welcome to-*"

*"The words you are looking for,"* said Orcus firmly, *"are 'my life.' You mean to thank me for your life."*

Leenah, Orcus and Drake stared at each other.

Leenah said, *"Grandfather was supposed to come here to an old abandoned monastery. I cannot say why he took them to the real nest."*

Drake said, *"Nest?"*

But Orcus was twisting Xanix's head. *"It was hypnosis, wasn't it? Your kind has been unable to even touch the ancient artifacts since the curse and now you've found a way to take possession of a human and puppeteer them to use an artifact."*

*"But, grandfather-*"

*"Where would they learn such a power?"* asked Drake. *"Their wizards are not that capable. It would take a powerf- It must have been the Sorcerer! We've had dealings with him in Synisvania. This is his kind of magic. He's not the most moral person, but to help dragons in this way..."*

*"But, grandfather is in danger. You must save him!"*

*"You lied to me. Your grandfather can rot in-"* Drake stopped at the hurt in

Leenah's face. *"Look, your grandfather will have to wait. I'm sorry."*

Leenah hard face returned. *"You have to go there to get what you want, anyway."*

Orcus nodded and said, *"We could get the dragon to take us. We'd get there before the dragons."*

*"His wing is broken,"* said Leenah, as if Orcus was stupid.

*"I can fix that rather quickly."*

Drake said, *"No! This thing is a monster. He's too dangerous-"*

*"Monster?"* said General Xanix, his head rearing against the demon's grip. *"What you Rangers did to the trolls was more monstrous than anything any dragon army ever did. And the Demon Princes...They like to say how proud they are of all their vices and misdeeds, but none of them ever talks about what they did on the peak of Titus."*

*"I don't have time for this,"* Drake said. He looked at Orcus. *"You can fix him? Then fix him. But Leenah's not going with you unless you swear not to interfere with us. It seems to me you're here to keep the dragons in check. You'll get to stop them getting their hands on the stone, but its going home with us-"*

Leenah said with disdain, *"You not give me orders. I go where I please. I stay where I please too. If I go you promise to save grandfather. Real promise."*

*"I promise,"* said Drake.

*"Promise on life of Trueblade."*

Drake hesitated, then said, *"I promise on the life of Marshal Trueblade and on my honor as a Ranger to save your grandfather, or die trying."*

- - -

The Rangers buried their dead and gathered what weapons they had. Jerrick was to take four men back to Vanasheen on dromo. Three would stay with Captain Drake.

The healing of General Xanix had not taken long nor had it produced any pyrotechnics. Orcus was by the dragon's head, conversing, when Drake and Leenah approached.

*"...we had to think of the consequences,"* Orcus was saying.

*"Evil is always a choice."*

*"How can you say that and then you defend the actions of your people by talking about nature?"*

Drake interrupted, *"Is it safe to have his mouth open?"*

*"I've kept his fire snuffed,"* said Orcus. Just keep your distance when getting onto him."

The dragon's eyes glowed and he snarled, *"No! You cannot do this. I am a person, not some mule! You dare not do this. I shall rend your flesh. I am a lord of the air. Do you hear me? I am a lord-"*

Orcus muzzled the dragon with his chains and said, *"Yes. We heard you."*

*Now let's see if your mastery of the air allows you to carry passengers."*

Drake sat in the middle of the dragon's back with Leenah. His men crouched behind him. Everyone was holding fast to a chain harness Orcus had made. The demon prince leapt up to the dragon's shoulders. Fire from his fingertips formed into reins along the dragon's neck and around his snout.

*"The Bridle of Zura,"* said Orcus, throwing back his hood. *"No animal can refuse it's power, and dragons are just enough animal for it to work."*

Drake looked down. Just sitting on the dragon, he was already twelve feet above the ground. *"Couldn't you just blink us to the north? Can't demons do that?"*

*"Yes, that's how I got all the way out here. But it takes so much energy and preparation that I will not be able to do it again for some time."*

Flying was spectacular. As the dragon ran along the ground and then climbed into the air with its wing beating loudly, the sensation of acceleration rose in Drake's gut. As they went higher, the sense of distance and a slowing of time made the world below seem unreal.

Leenah seemed to be feeling the wonder too. She was leaning into his side and had taken hold of his elbow while looking out at the desert with wide eyes and a half smile. Even in the buffeting winds of flight, Drake marveled, her hair seemed to stay in place. Unlike Orcus, whose

mane was whipping about while he laughed.

*"You feel that, young captain?"* Orcus asked. *"That is the sensation of control; of harnessing the world to your will. It is amazing in small doses, but will addict you if you do not mind its dangers. Then you become like the Ancient Ones, worshipping control of everything and everyone."*

*"And the demons don't wish to rule?"* Drake asked derisively.

*"We want what we've always wanted: to be masters of our own destinies."*

*"And murdering dragons is a part of that?"*

Orcus said nothing. Below, a green oasis circled by dromos and traders floated in the sea of sand. Leenah shifted into a more relaxed position next to Drake as she followed it with her gaze.

*"You have to understand the history,"* said Orcus. *"Some of the rivalries of our world are truly from before time, like us Demons and the Ancient Ones. Some are intense, like the elves and dark elves."*

*"But Dragons are relatively new. The world was not prepared for their hatred. All the dragons see in their mind is the destruction of the other dragons. In their war, everyone else matters no more than a scurrying mole matters to a charging knight. It was the hatred of the blacks and reds that ended the last age and it was to prevent their coming back in force*

*that all the weapons of power in that time were cursed against them."*

Drake asked, *"And this required blood?"*

*"Yes. A blood sacrifice of a hundred dragon whelps, fifty Red, fifty Black. We bathed hundreds of objects of power in that blood, ensorceling them against the touch of dragons."*

*"That sounds terrible."*

*"A resurgence of the dragons would set Alamaze aflame and there would be nothing left for anyone to rule over. The dragons had been our creation, the result of our quest to marry hellfire and beasts. It is our duty to keep their rivalry from trampling the world, even if it means a heinous act."*

*"'Duty'? That's an odd word for someone who only wants to do as he pleases."*

Orcus smiled. *"It pleases me to meet my obligations."*

The mountains ahead were growing. Beside Drake, Leenah had shifted her attention to them, nervousness coming back into her body. He thought about how nervous she still got on a horse, though she had improved.

Drake said, *"Leenah, I'm sorry about your grandfather. And about how I spoke- I think you're a good person and feel like you'd make- I'm sorry."*

The girl just pulled away without looking, and let go his arm.

*"Dragon,"* said Orcus. They were almost to the cliffs. Below them was a group of twelve men and a few dromos of cargo going north.

*"You sure?"* asked Drake.

*"Yes. They're staying in disguise, but I can tell."*

Leenah shouted, *"We must attack them! Grandfather-"*

Orcus said, *"They would kill your grandfather before we could take him."*

*"Then how-"*

*"We will just fly to the mountain and let them think the help they sent for has arrived. They will bring him to us."*

Drake looked around. *"How do you know that they sent for help?"*

*"My eyes see a hundred dragons coming, about half-an-hour to the west."*

They landed on a ledge in front of the hidden temple entrance. The doors were recessed below a natural overhang of dark, mottled basalt. One side of the ledge was littered with jagged boulders as large as a man. The other side led off into a narrow path. Everywhere was full of folds and shadows. A hundred feet below was the desert, spread out flat to the south, the dragon-men almost at the cliff.

Drake dismounted and set his men in ambush to the side. He hid Leenah as far back as he could. Orcus stood with the



Black Dragon general away from the path, near the boulders.

*"He won't warn them?"* Drake asked Orcus, pointing at Xanix.

*"No. With the bridle on, only the animal part of his mind works."*

It took fifteen minutes for the dragon in the form of men to navigate the circuitous path up the cliff to the entrance. They arrived single file, from the left. The glassmaker was fourth. The plan was to wait until seven persons had come off the path, but when the sixth dragon-man appeared, the line paused, as they sensed something was wrong with General Xanix.

Drake nodded a signal to his men and they charged silently. Drake took the one right in front of the old man and kicked the robed avatar firmly in the hip, knocking him back, off of the edge. His men took the three behind the prisoner. Drake pivoted to his right, but Leenah was already there, attacking his intended target. Her push was surprisingly strong, but not enough to send the dragon-man over the cliff. Drake brought a swift sword stroke down on the staggered figure's neck, killing him. The remaining dragon-man was already attacking and Drake pushed Leenah aside then stepped forward.

A chain flung from Orcus' sleeve knocked the avatar over the cliff.

The other three Rangers had used the bottleneck of the path to defeat the rest of the dragon. Leenah and her

grandfather were hugging near the doors.

*"I didn't need your help, Orcus,"* said Drake. *"I could have taken one man."*

*"Yes, but you needed to save your strength. There's going to be a brigade of dragons here soon."*

The old man and the girl had gone into the temple.

*"Defending against the dragons is your job."*

*"Is it?"* asked Orcus, looking amused.

*"If you want to stop them taking the palantir, it is. You've got good terrain: they can't come at you all at once and the overhang prevents them burning you out from the air. I'll leave my men here with you."*

*"Then I'd better get busy,"* said Orcus, turning to the desert. He lifted a hand high started chanting. At his side, General Xanix twitched. Dark lightning flickered about Orcus' fingers with the sound of buzzing flies. Then he began an invocation:

Oh dead of a thousand ages!

Oh life that has lingered on!

Arise to pain. Arise to hate.

Arise to war, from Hel's gate!

Across the desert floor, the sand rippled as the dark lightning played over it, then skeletons unbent and stood from under the ground, weapons in hand.

Drake said, *"That-That was you! Those skeletons that attacked us were yours."*

*"I thought we had gotten past this point. You know I arranged our meeting."*

*"But they could have killed us,"* said Drake.

*"Oh, stow your dramatics, Captain. No Ranger patrol that loses to a handful of skeletons is a real Ranger patrol to begin with."*

*"You endangered Leenah."*

*"Oh, I certainly did not."*

The skeletons were clambering up the cliff, taking defensive positions all over the mountain, heads to the sky.

Orcus mounted his dragon and said, "The best thing about skeletons is that they have no flesh to burn. I only regret that I am too weak to raise more than a few hundred."

Dragonfire blazed about them as the attack began. As predicted the flames could not reach them. Dragons tried landing on the limited space of the ledge, but Orcus whipped them back with his chains and his dragon's wings. One attacker hovered just out of chain's reach, like the world's fattest, ugliest hummingbird and sent a blast of fire at Orcus. It was powerful enough dislodge him and the bridle of Zura from General Xanix.

The freed dragon snarled, *"You damned demon! You-"*

Orcus snapped him across his mouth with a flying chain and the dragon leaped out into the air and flew off.

The standoff continued to hold. Any other dragons that tried the hovering trick were soon covered in suicidally leaping skeletons from above and weighed down to the ground while being dismembered.

The captain realized that Leenah and her grandfather were gone.

Drake ran into the temple without looking back.

- - -

The entrance led right into a maze. Drake was certain that the old man and Leenah knew all kinds of secret passages through it, but he would have to find the palantir on his own. The walls were bare stone, narrow and just concave enough to make his eyes hurt from disorientation. They were coated with a thick layer of unidentifiable slime, which glowed greenish yellow. Some paths seemed more subtly worn and better kept. Some seemed to have more lighting. For a long time, Drake kept to the most obvious paths, checking for traps and loose footing.

After half-and-hour, Orcus spoke behind him. *"This is not a human place." The Demon Prince emerged from the shadows in his robe, pale face visible with the hood thrown back. "Human's have flair for decorating. A few skulls on spikes, some blood spatter on the walls, a few tapestries to-"*

*"Why have you abandoned the fight?"*

*"The fight is won. The Rangers have ridden to the rescue."*

*"Rangers?"* asked Drake.

*"The Third Ranger Division, under the command of Marshal Trueblade, has begin driving the dragons away."*

*"How did they know-"*

*"Using a raven familiar to send messages is not a great task for someone like me,"* said Orcus. *"Signing your name to the distress message probably helped get them here in time."*

*"You put my name on- You are a dishonorable piece of-"*

Orcus held up his finger in warning.

*"Again, you mispeak and insult me when you mean to thank me for saving your life."*

Drake reach for his sword in anger.

*"Stay your hand, my young captain. You are the most likeable person I've met in ages. I'd hate to kill you and end our friendship."*

*"We are not friends."*

*"I disagree. I think I'm probably the only friend you have right now."*

Sarcastically, Drake asked, *"So, you're on my side?"*

*"No, but you're don't have a life that allows other friends."*

*"My men-"*

*"You live your entire life as a Ranger. Your men can't be your friends because you may have to send them to their deaths." Orcus half-smiled. "The other officers could be your friends, but they know you are Trueblade's loyal vessel, filled with his vision and they will either avoid you or try to use you to gain his favor. And Trueblade himself will forever see you as the boy following his path, never reaching his level."*

Drake could think of no reply.

Orcus said, *"Leenah might have been your friend, but that's rather unlikely now that she hates you."*

*"It matters not. This attempt to force your friendship on me is not enough for me to let you follow me."*

*"Follow you?"* Orcus chuckled. *"You are lost. I have no wish to follow you."*

*"So why are we talking?"*

Orcus looked like he was parceling out the truth in his mind, for sale to Drake. *"Let's just say that you aren't the only one whose life leaves him short of friends. I wanted to warn you off this path. It leads to the nest."*

*"Nest?"*

Orcus stepped softly into some shadows and was gone.

Drake turned back to the path. Was it the right way? Orcus had to have lied to him. That was the demon's way.

Motion to the sides. Leenah walked past,

in the distance, not looking his way. Drake turned and trotted over to the spot. No one there. Then more movement in the distance. Was it her? Didn't matter. He followed.

The chase was brief, and Drake found Leenah in a chamber that could in other places be called a chapel. Weapons decorated the walls and there was a lowered floor for congregants and a platform at the far end with light shining down from a shaft in the domed rock above. The girl stood in the light, beside an altar shaped like the head of a giant snake emerging from the ground, its head reared back, fangs bared. The snake's eyes were jeweled amber spheres, malevolent with blood red vertical slashes.

*"Is that it?"* Drake asked, approaching.  
*"There are two of them?"*

*"Yes. These are the Eyes of the Serpent. Each is a palantir in its own right. But most palantirs can only see the surface of things. Used together, these two can tell you if an army is waiting in ambush amongst the trees or see through the deception if they try to hide their numbers."*

Drake stroke one orb, and vapor seemed to stir within. *"These would be of great aid to the Rangers in-"*

*"The Rangers shall not have them,"* said Leenah. *"I only led you here to keep you away from the others."*

*"Other who?"*

*"We are the Guardians of the Eyes. The others would have had you in the maze, but I kept them away and led you here." Leenah looked half-ashamed. "You may be a liar, but you did try to protect me. And teach me to ride. Once the dragons are gone, you can leave."*

*"Leenah,"* said Drake, *"I'm sorry, but those jewels are the whole reason I came here. I'm taking them."* He bent closer to see a way of releasing the orb. A powerful blow struck him and sent him clattering along the floor. He could take a breath with the pain.

Leenah was transforming as he watched. Her eyes flared yellow and her skin turned scaly green. The coils of her hair lifted apart with a life of their own, growing snake's heads at the ends. Fangs descended from below her upper lips. From the waist down her body morphed into a tail at least fifteen feet long. Half that length stayed on the ground as Leenah moved to the wall, the rest of her upright.

As Drake drew his sword, he grunted, *"Is no one in this gods-forsaken land what they seem?"*

But, Leenah did not respond. This Leenah did not seem able to speak. Instead she came at him with the spear held high. He dodged the first few thrusts, backing away, and then his back hit the wall. The next thrust he parried down with his sword. And aimed a response, but he could not bring himself to put malice into the blow and Leenah dodged easily.



Drake edged the battle closer to the Eyes, hoping to find a way to remove them before killing Leenah became necessary. Sometimes the gorgon Leenah stabbed at him. Sometimes she swung the spear in a wide arc. Stepping under that arc provided him with opportunities to hack at her abdomen, but his half-speed strikes were only to drive her back.

Inevitably, he was hit, the point of the spear penetrating into his ribs through the leather of his armor.

*"Unngh."* The wound was more pain than injury, but he was too short of breath to say more as he fell to one knee.

The real Leenah flashed back at his side. *"Captain Drake! Can you speak?"*

As Leenah continued with apologies, however, a shadow crept out of the wall and started wrestling with one of the Eyes.

Orcus!

*"Nhhnn."* Drake pointed and Leenah turned to see the thief. She became the gorgon again, tail whipping as she picked up her spear and screeched so loudly it echoed around the chamber without end. The shadow pulled one Eye free just as the spear point sank into it. The figure stretched impossibly and pulled itself free of the shaft. Leenah swung the spear at it, but it melded back into the dark of a corner before she could connect.

*"Orcus!"* said Drake. *"I know how your*

*little trick works, remember? I know you're still here."*

A warm chuckle echoed around them. Before Drake could respond, seemingly blank walls opened like doors and dozens of gorgons slithered into the room, each larger than Leenah. The girl kept herself in front of Drake as he lay on the ground.

The gorgons swept the room, but Orcus was truly gone.

One by one, they shrunk back into human shape, looking more like shopkeepers and farmers than warriors. The glassmaker approached out of the crowd, yelling in the southern language at Drake.

*"Grandfather is angry and me and at you,"* said Leenah as the old man continued to speak in anger. *She was human again. "He says that now the demons have a powerful tool to bring chaos to the world."*

At this point Leenah spoke harshly back to the man, who seemed stunned at her words. He took a few breaths while looking Drake over, then spoke again, less angrily.

*"Grandfather says that we Guardians cannot pursue the demon. Our kind power is tied to this temple. But you have the power of the Rangers behind you. You can track him and bring back the Eye."*

*"I have no power of that kind either,"* said Drake. *"I would not know how to*

*find him. I'd never even seen a demon before Orcus."*

*"Grandfather will give you the other eye," said Leenah. "It is linked to the other. You will be able to feel its presence as you grow closer."*

*"Like the children's game?" asked Drake. "Hotter and colder?"*

*"We are offering you a palantir," said Leenah. "But you must promise to return them both to us. It is your debt for leading Orcus to the jewels."*

*"I'm a Ranger! I can't just leave my duties and go find your things."*

Another exchange between Leenah and her grandfather and then she said, *"War is coming to Alamaze. In the course of your duties, you will find Orcus again. You will have your chance to right this wrong."* Leenah looked at Drake solemnly. *"We have guarded the Eyes for centuries. If it takes you a few years to return it to us, that matters not."*

- - -

Captain Drake limped down the cliff path. Already, a command tent had been set up on the sands, a camp emerging around it. A dozen great bloated corpses showed where dragons had fallen before their force quit the battle.

The colors of Trueblade flew high over everything. The Eye was tucked into Drake's side, within a plain sack. He was returning to his commander with half the prize, a failure in the great man's eyes to

be sure. Drake thought about what Orcus had said. Was Drake's world only as large as the Ranger army? Was this really the life of his choosing?

From within the bag, Drake thought he heard a faint, familiar chuckle, then he walked into the sand to do his duty.

**- THE END -**



Game: **ALAMAZE** Web Site: [www.alamaze.co](http://www.alamaze.co) Forum: [www.kingdomsofarcania.net](http://www.kingdomsofarcania.net)

Genre: **Epic Fantasy** Turn Frequency: once per 4 days

Game Length: Up to 40 turns (or previous victory: games generally last about 4 months on average)

Pricing: Monthly subscription of \$19.95 per month, for about seven turns (about 100 pages of results in pdf format) per month. More games available simultaneously at higher service levels.

**Alamaze is the preeminent PBEM strategy game of epic fantasy. Winner of numerous Game-of-the-Year Awards, including Origins, GAMA, and reader polls by Flagship and Paper Mayhem magazines. It was critically acclaimed by Dragon Magazine (#131) as one of the finest game designs in *any* genre.**

**C**hoose to become the undisputed leader of a legendary kingdom. Compete and cooperate with fourteen diabolical human rulers. Embark on an epic quest for dominion over Alamaze. Here you will guide your noble court of princes, dukes, counts and barons to execute your diplomacy and political objectives. With objectives in mind and targets in sight, command your network of spies and agents. Develop the awesome magical powers of your important and limited cadre of spellcasters and discuss with them the best application of their talents. Yes, you have experienced military commanders as well, who will grow in their tactical expertise as the campaign advances. They command your armies - each army composition unique to their kingdom. Equip leaders, agents or wizards with powerful artifacts such as *The Gem of the Planes* and *Elan; Flaming Sword of the North*, recovered from the lairs of legendary monsters in the wild. Gain a seat on the exclusive Alamaze High Council, reveal skeletons in the closet on your hated rivals, recruit and gain the divinations of a High Priestess of Alamaze. Plan to achieve your kingdom's Early Strategic Objective, and from there, go on to achieve victory in a variety of ways, including The Rex, The Lion's Share, and Secret Victory.

**The 15 Kingdoms of Alamaze Classic Steel** (each player will play the part of one of these):

(full names and descriptions at <http://www.alamaze.co/the-fantasy-kingdoms>):

**The Ancient Ones:** A small cadre of very impressive and unique individuals preferring to work secretly.

**The Black Dragons:** The fastest moving forces, more in tune with humans than their larger cousins.

**The Dark Elves:** More covert and fanatically bent and perhaps more magical than their hated rivals.

**The Demon Princes:** Things weren't bad enough before? Maybe the most unique fantasy kingdom ever.

**The Dwarven Lords:** Expert with stone and gold, they also have political clout, and mountain prowess.

**The High Elves:** No introduction needed. A very balanced kingdom with good geography.

**The Stone Giants:** Powerful race centrally positioned. Everyone says they want to be their friend.

**The Gnomes:** Consumed with alchemy, they cherish all magic. A portal they seek to attack the Dwarves.

**The Rangers:** A fun kingdom with multiple lines of strategy possible requiring skillful play in all facets.

**The Red Dragons:** A fire-breathing pure military with great mobility and ultimate big-stick diplomacy.

**The Sorcerer:** Maybe the kingdom with the most spellcasters and the best mid-level spells.

**The Trolls:** Big, mean, strong, regenerative, feared, and not that bright. The most role-played kingdom.

**The Underworld:** Pirates, assassins, thieves, dealers in extortion, subterfuge, and information. Popular.

**The Warlock:** Best battle magic, lowest magic research cost. Geographically central, diplomacy needed.

**The Witchlord:** Rumor has it he is the most powerful mage, and destined to rule all of Alamaze.

Players old and new have discovered the resurgent Alamaze, returning in 2013 with a new map of Alamaze, new rulebooks, pdf results, website, active community through the player forum, and same day help if needed through email. Now under the direction of its original and multiple Origins Game of the Year Award winning designer, it is developing a fast following of new and returning enthusiasts.

**New games form in various formats, including games exclusively for new or newly returning players!**

**VISIT & SIGNUP AT [HTTP://WWW.ALAMAZE.CO/SIGN-UP/](http://www.alamaze.co/sign-up/)**



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# **Rick spills the magic beans**

## **An Interview with the Founder of Alamaze**

**Charles Mosteller interviewing Rick McDowell**

### **How are things going with Alamaze, currently?**

I have been really pleased with what we call The Resurgence, beginning in April, 2013. Since then, we have started over 140 games, so about one a week. We appreciate the work we have had from many volunteers – for example – our about 60 page Valhalla publication consisting of all kinds of rankings and titles, updated each time a game ends. More importantly for development, which is what drives me, we have a really focused java programmer where I have been in the unique position of the programmer pushing me to complete my design ideas for what we call 3rd Cycle – The Choosing, instead of waiting for programming to complete. Its beta (we had an alpha) test is a couple weeks away as I write this October 8, 2015. A major feature is instead of players kind of knowing where each kingdom begins, now we have zones where a player can choose one of two kingdoms. For example, in The Choosing, the Talking Mountains in the northeast of the map may have either the traditional Dwarven Lords, or now the Warlock. And so on for each of 12 positions, out of 24 different kingdoms, ergo “The Choosing”, so instead of a set 12 positions, if my math is right, there are 144 possibilities. Lots of new positions including The

Necromancer, The Halflings, The Lizard King, The Pirates, The Amazons, The Illusionist, The Atlantians, the Nomads. We also now have something like 60 different brigade types, besides the 24 kingdom brigades there are recruitable brigades from owned towns and cities that vary by region, as well as over 20 Companion brigades, ranging from Mammoths to Wyvern and maybe 10 summoned brigades like Specters and Minotaur. Our spells (more than 70) and artifacts (also about 70) will be redefined. I love how active our still small community is, with over 22,000 forum posts in the last two years. They really reach out to help new players.

### **For those that don't know what it is, how would you describe Alamaze to someone who has never heard of it before?**

At the risk of scaring some off, I would say it's like chess for 12 players, on a larger board (map) where there is terrain, and each player has different pieces, and each player can make 16 moves a turn, with all moves executed simultaneously. Questions? J In a different voice, it's a deep strategic fantasy turn based game that won Game of the Year at the two major gaming conventions and has been played for 30 years, which, really, we can't say about

too many games. We have really modernized the presentation, but it is, as PBEM is known I assume, more like an electronic board game than, say, World of Warcraft.

**Alamaze has enjoyed various iterations. Of late, I keep running into terms such as 4th Scenario and 3rd Cycle and Resurgent. What do these terms mean, and how do they differ from one another?**

The Resurgence is when I took Alamaze back in 2013 after my older brother Phil passed away. The game is dedicated to Phil, who was much beloved. Originally I was going to do a 4th scenario for Alamaze (technically, within 2nd Cycle, but let's not confuse things) which would have been smaller variants. Instead, although I am not done, it is clearly going to be essentially a new game, both in presentation and design, so it is designated 3rd Cycle, but will still be Alamaze.

**What are your long term plans for Alamaze?**

I am planning on having 2nd Cycle (the version that has been around for a long time) remain available as long as there is interest, which I think may continue as we know some people know what they like. But we have frozen development there, intend to make it available, but attention is on 3rd Cycle and its first scenario, The Choosing. I think it will

blow people away. Alamaze and Fall of Rome both won Game of the Year. I want The Choosing to be considered better than either. It is a bit more complicated, but hopefully just from more choices available to make, and not logistics or such. No offense to logisticians. Certainly we will have another scenario or three after The Choosing, but for what we presently call PBEM, the next major project would be to finally get Kingdoms of Arcania out. At this stage of my life, with both daughters college graduated and gainfully employed, it's sort of the inspiration. I love being able to be creative, and we have a great developer as of now (I did the original Alamaze programming back in the day but can't do it now), and for people to then enjoy that.

**Whatever became of Kingdoms of Arcania?**

Fall of Rome was what Kingdoms of Arcania was supposed to be. Development costs in 2003 with developing the first GUI in PBEM was quite high, even the website was high. Quite high. So I made a decision to move to a game without all the magic that would be in Kingdoms of Arcania and that are in Alamaze, which was I guess what some would call the compromise of what Fall of Rome is. But, Fall of Rome is really a terrific game. The progress we have made on the processing and interface side is making Alamaze very close to Fall of Rome. Kingdoms of Arcania in both design and interface is

the next step, but it will of course be turn based, what I call episodic strategy.

**Not everybody likes the same kind of games. What kind of gamers do you think would love or hate Alamaze, and why do you feel that way?**

Our sweet spot, beyond the obvious PBM players, is board gamers. Until there is some sort of global transformation, I don't think we will get kids. I just know when we offered free trials of Fall of Rome, the kids thought it was broken because there wasn't animation.

Alamaze, I like to think, introduced lots of strategic aspects to, let's say deep, turn based gaming. So generally I think our player base is pretty smart, enjoys a unique gaming experience instead of WoW, is generally familiar with PBM games. Sorry if this seems like a shot, but an Alamaze turn is not like, say, a Legends turn. In Alamaze you are wondering about what orders to issue, not about how to issue them. Sorry. In a sentence, Alamaze is a strategic fantasy wargame for now mainly 12 players, each controlling a kingdom, where military might, economics, diplomacy, political power, covert ability, magic, artifacts, and the ability of the player to discern the situation are what matter.

**I encountered a rumor a while back about a World War II game. Are you heading in that direction, and if so, how is that shaping up, and what will**

**distinguish it from other games that cover that time period?**

Actually, while I considered that, I was approached by a company asking me to design a board game, carte blanche. So when Alamaze 3rd Cycle gets out, I hope I can do that project successfully. Since I haven't proven my gravitas in WWII, I think the game will be my strength of multi-player strategy with a fantasy background. We may consider some licensing opportunities. I just wonder how I can go from my usual 80 or so pages of rules down to a max of 12 which I think is necessary for a commercial board game.

**From your perspective and based upon your experience over the years, what is the single most difficult thing about bringing a new game to the market?**

I assume we are talking about a PBEM game? So, one thing is it is very hard to find your potential players. They generally are not on Google looking for you. So it's mainly word of mouth. I wish I could find a couple sites worth advertising on. I think Suspense and Decision could be in a position to try to unite companies to attract players or have players try new games. I know that no other PBEM companies want to trade player lists with me, though.

**How many years have you been involved with creating and**



## **publishing games of various sorts?**

I created Alamaze as a test of my initial foray into creativity in 1985. When it was so well received by my friends, who were conducting secret meetings in the middle of the night and such to plot the next turn's strategy, I decided maybe I had something here. Fleshed it out, got recognition from Paper Mayhem and Flagship and of course the home run was the review in Dragon Magazine that took us to the top and got us Game of the Year at Origins and GAMA. But, I had a business career, and my friend that was running it wasn't doing so well, so first it got licensed (not exclusively) to RSI (Duelmasters, Hyborian War), and then, eventually moved "domestically" to my brother, Phil. I was then away from the creative arts for over 20 years, but always looked fondly back on how that satisfied me: to make a computer run game, you have to be very disciplined and reduce everything to numbers, but of course, if you don't have good ideas, no one cares. So, I have taken great satisfaction in the joy 1000's of players over the 30 years have had in Alamaze. Fall of Rome I think had lots of advances, but it isn't fantasy-based, cost a lot of money, and ultimately I have to conclude it was not commercially successful, while along with Alamaze, winning Game of the Year. As I mentioned, I've been asked to do a board game, RSI asked me to do Forgotten Realms (the game under that name is not mine, I want to make clear – they gave up trying to program my

design). I have various domain names reserved, in case I live so long or can license, but mainly, my game credits are Game of the Year winners Alamaze and Fall of Rome.

## **With regard to the setting that your Alamaze games take place in, what was the inspiration for that setting, and what would be the ultimate incarnation of that setting?**

Well, I had a four year AD&D campaign in college, exploring outside the fringes of the rules. Major battles, rulership, etc.. My team won the University of Florida AD&D tournament as total outsiders. Then, out of college, as a single guy, I had two teams of dedicated AD&D players for my campaigns, actually called the A and the B group, based on experience. This while working at Coopers & Lybrand during daylight. So my college campaign I called Alamaze, and not anticipating a commercial path, lended that name to the PBM game, and have wondered since how Alamaze wouldn't have been called Kingdoms of Arcania, which seems much less inscrutable. As I mentioned above, Alamaze 3rd Cycle is around the corner, and will likely have several scenarios. 3rd Cycle, The Choosing is quite a bit different, particularly in the strategic possibilities. Our players are anxiously awaiting The Choosing.

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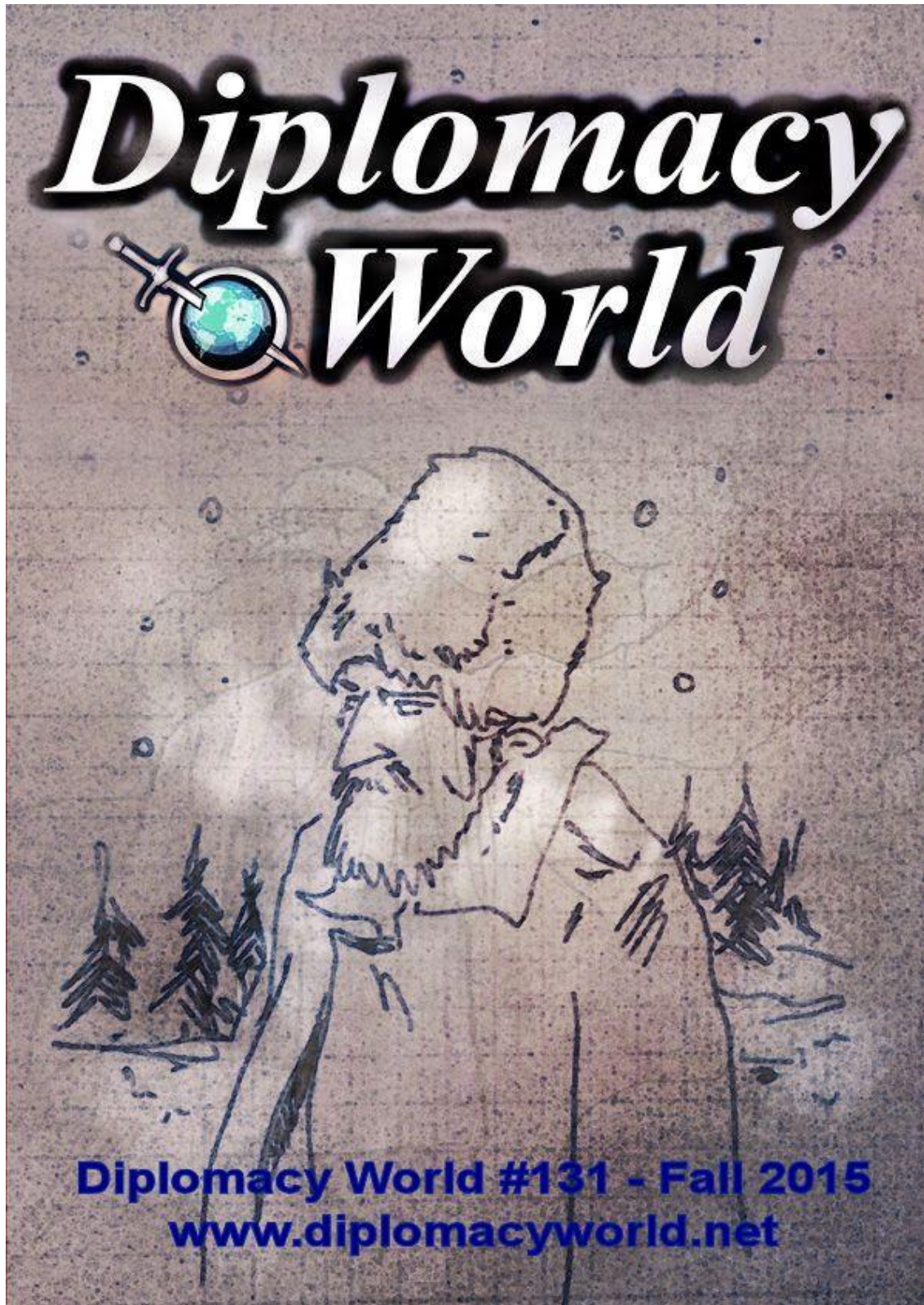
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# The Glory of Kings

## One Player's View of Agema Games' TGOK

Ry Schwark (aka Deacon on the Agema Forums)

In these days of digitized everything, it's nice to find an old-school hand-moderated game.

The Glory of Kings is set in the early 18th century. Players typically take the role of nation leaders, typically kings and princes, and attempt to steer their nations to glory.

The game is generally Euro-centric, but Asian, Indian, and African powers are available for those who want a different kind of challenge. As the leader of your people, you will make the key military, financial, and diplomatic decisions that will decide your fate in the world.

The game is played in monthly increments, with turns coming about every three weeks. Turns run £10, though there is a frequently-used option to do unlimited orders which will result in higher fees (as the more time it takes the GM to process the orders, the more you will be charged). While extra orders

will allow you to do more, it is fair to say it won't always allow you to accomplish more. Speaking of orders, Turn orders are relatively free-form, so you a lot of liberty in how you approach the game. Some just want to conquer, some want to build up their economy and become wealthy, some want to win friends and have an elegant court life. Some try to do it all! There is a monthly newspaper that tells of the doings of the world, and most players do their best to make sure their court is shown in a favorable light.

The first thing to decide in picking up the game, is what type of position you'd like to play. More experienced players would encourage you to take a smaller position in an existing game to get your feet wet and get a feel for the game. One of the natural consequences of a well-run and long-running hand moderated game is that success isn't easy, and setbacks come frequently. If it was too easy to achieve victories in the game, then 'success inflation' would set in quickly, and the game would collapse under its own weight. The game rewards the persistent and resilient players who keep pushing and trying.

Key decisions that you will make is how to use your treasury. You'll have yearly expense for upkeep of your fortifications, research academies, churches and



troops. Then you'll probably want to invest a part of the excess tax and trade revenues to invest in growing your trade revenue, so you'll have more to spend in subsequent years.

Another key resource you get is recruits. Every year you get a certain number of hale and hearty young men whom you can use to build up your military or improve your nation by using them for things like a judiciary or introducing new farming techniques. Recruits can also be used to make your investment monies stretch farther, but this is generally viewed by most players as a very inefficient use of a relatively scarce resource.

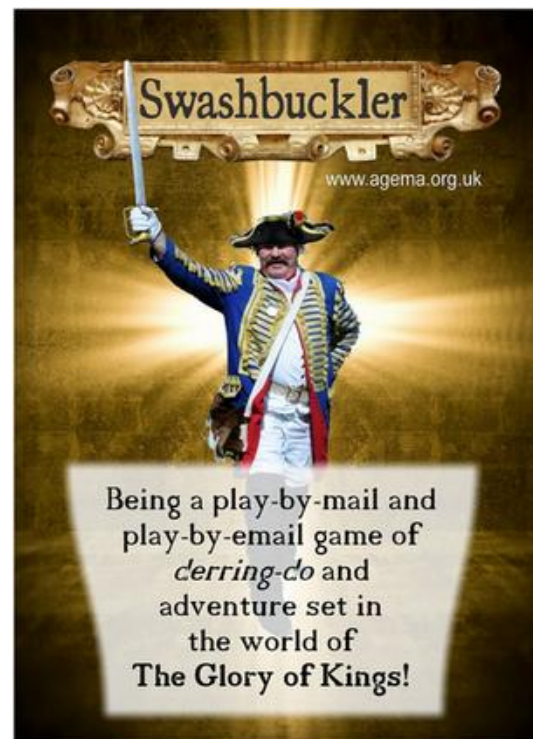
A key characteristic of the game that can sometimes be frustrating is a position's "Honour" rating. The game wants to encourage you to play in period. So the better you play in period, please your nobles and others, the more honour you will accumulate.

Shock your nobles and people with your outlandish ideas and actions, and watch your honour plummet. If honour falls too low, you can have rebellions and other problems. Some players like to think of

honour as another game currency – the good will you have banked with your people. You can then 'spend' honour to do something drastic that might upset the better sorts in your nation. Honour is a bit position dependent, so if you've decided that you want to try your hand at being Blackbeard then treachery and nastiness are going to impress your men, not effete courtesy!

For those who want an even simpler introduction to the Glory of Kings world, there is the Swashbuckler option where you play just a single character trying to rise in the world for £5 a turn. The position is naturally much more limited, but it can help give you a sense of the world.

There are new player guides, as well as many players willing to advise and support new players at the AGEMA Games forums: [www.agema.darkbb.com](http://www.agema.darkbb.com)





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# Caliphate Nights

## The Merchant

**Sid Razavi (Player Phoenix 1995-1998 then 2008 to now)**

The ebony box was a perfect cube, a hand's width on its sides and unadorned except for a gold lock fastener on one edge. That was the only indication the box could even be opened but Shiriin knew better than to try even if she had the key.

The box had been with her family for three generations and she would be sad to be parted with it. Wrapping herself in a blue pashmina, she watched the heavy downpour as thick droplets rippled pools on the cobblestone outside. A thick cover of foliage, waterproofed by oils from the local flora, protected her stall. Yet her brow glistened from the humidity. She tucked her hand beneath her shawl and creased her fingers through damp braids.

The rainy season was terrible for business. Few off-worlders ventured beyond the starport, seeking the curiosities and local handicraft that was her main stock and trade. At least the rains quenched the fires. The oxygen rich atmosphere making combustion an all too common occurrence. In the heat of summer, caravan drivers would swap tales of far flung settlements that were nothing more than ash and darkened rocks from one cycle to the next. The planetary news channels only bothered to report the wildest of the fires. Sweeping through the jungles,

destroying sectors in days. Marking the planet with red spots visible from space.

Life is fire and rebirth, the proverb went. Shiriin had lived to see it a dozen times.

Fire brought opportunity. Rebirth was a cycle away. The story was writ large in the worlds beyond as well as here, although Shiriin had never seen much cause to see for herself. She had family far away beyond once, not long ago, whose lives turned on intrigues meaningless to her. If the news had a tenth of a cubic of truth to them: the old generals had been swept away, a Caliph crowned and whatever else, business was better than ever.

The caravans passing through her village brought gold perfume wrought from the silken vines and returned with goods from distant worlds. Worlds not placed on any star in the archaic fabric-woven charts popular with the tourists. Worlds that were still not well marked on the info net available to her portable terminal either. If the worlds mattered little to her, the passing trade of hundreds of starships had risen the aspirations of those around her. Wants unknown under the watchful eyes of the



clergy, were now insatiable appetites for the novel and distant. The monks had stopped visiting and the seminary had closed. The body and soul are in constant struggle, so it went, Shiriin recanted absentmindedly.

She traced the edge of the box with her fingers, her nails dappled with peeling gold varnish. Warmth escaped on contact and neck hairs tensed, her pupils dilated. She fought the urge to remove her fingers immediately and her touch lingered, compelling her will against her instincts. She knew so little about it and a melancholy gripped her as she realised she would know nothing more when it was taken. Bought, she corrected herself. Not taken. A business transaction. The fool parts with her inheritance and the wise one trades what cannot be enjoyed beyond the grave. So the proverb went.

The box was a relic from some ancient civilisation. Dwarven was the colloquial term for the craft of the aliens. Little was known about them except perhaps to the clergy. An ancient ally or enemy of the Dewiek, depending on the tale. Decimated by them or disappeared long before

## the ancient war that shaped the local star systems.

How it had worked its way into her grandfather's possession was as uncertain as its purpose. He had been a soldier for the Confederacy but then few who were free had been anything else. That he had smuggled it from the Ruin system under the nose of the clergy, almost certain. Knowledge is the preserve of the righteous, so the proverb went.

If he had been righteous, he hid it well in his litany of drinking and whoring. His progeny born of a dozen women, many of them indentured with no birthing rights. Shiriin remembered little of him but if some could call their grandfather kindly or sweet, she wondered with awe at their great fortune in life. He was a cantankerous old bigot who enjoyed taking the belt to his kin and worse besides, if half of what was best forgotten was true. His death was widely mourned, a burial fit for a war hero given to him and yet there was none who missed him the day that followed nor spoke of him since. The dead are best laid buried, so the proverb went.

The one heirloom his grandfather left, other than debts that saw his three daughters indentured, was the box. A possession of such a shaitun brought to word and rumour curses and bad luck. Shiriin was the least superstitious of her surviving family and took the box after

the suicide of her uncle. She was too polite to mock those who couldn't put together her uncle's decade long avoidance of tithes and his improbable suicide. If there was comfort in believing the box was responsible for the forks sticking in his sternum and chin whilst he hung upside down, Shiriin would give them no wrinkles of pointless worry. She only wondered why the Brotherhood would not proudly take credit. The True One wills as the True One wills. So it went.

She couldn't help a startled gasp as her eyes focused on the man sitting opposite her. Had she been reminiscing so intently as to miss his entry through the parted canvas before her eyes? Perhaps the rain had covered his footsteps but he showed no sign of having been outside. His honey coloured hair, dry and greased back, his augmented eyes a dull glow of machine red. He wore a tattered leather jacket with worn studs. His biceps ridged with raised smooth bars, his hands covered in a metallic exoskeleton. "Hello Shiriin," he intoned. Fear is knowing the devil knows your name. So it goes.

"*You are late,*" she tried to regain some advantage. A bargain with shaitun was a business transaction nonetheless.

"*My apologies. The shuttle pilot had some difficulty locating your village. Do you have what I came for?*"

Shiriin didn't see much point in the usual formalities. The spiced tea would remain in the pot, the nougat uneaten. There was no pretence of civilised behaviour

with this one.

"Yes," she slid the box across the table and he only gave it a momentary glance before his eyes were back on her. Her pulse held, the stream of sweat ice water down her back. He showed no sign of breathing, just the quiet hum of machine grafted on flesh.

"*I did not doubt it. The job is being taken care of as we speak.*" He got up and slid the box across the table into the satchel hung around his neck. He touched it for no more than a second but his posture visibly tensed.

Shiriin began to inwardly curse his impolite, wordless exit before he turned back and looked at her. Did the creature read her mind?

"*Oh Shiriin. Forgive me. I normally don't do this but I must admit I am curious. Why?*"

"*Why?*" Shiriin couldn't disguise her shock. The flagrant breaking of the 'no questions asked' part of the contract wasn't the truly perturbing aspect of his enquiry. It was the fact he was *curious*.

"*Yes, why.*" The hint of emotion now evaporated.

Her instincts urged her to flee but pride seethed into anger and determination. Before the fall, so the proverb went. So it went but so be damned! Tremors of rage passed and she poured herself the now

cold tea and sipped defiantly. The porcelain rattled briefly as she replaced the cup.

*"Once we were a family. With land and children. Nieces and nephews. We had farms. We didn't have the comforts of those megacorp worlds. We didn't have an easy living but what we had, we had built on unforgiving soil. We took the hard rocks, the cold barren wastelands and we made them home. We had faith. In the True One, in the eventual triumph of the Confederacy, in the promise of the Prophet Samuel."*

"Then they came. They took: Our land. Our families. They ate our menfolk. Enslaved our kin. Drove us from our farms. Wrecked our government. They took away the meaning of those years of toil and they gloated about it. They are savage animals and worst of all, they think they won!"

*"That is why."* Shiriin calmed her voice but her hand still shook with rage.

If the man was moved by her story his expression changed little. He seemed to consider it and whatever momentary interest it held for him seemed to pass.

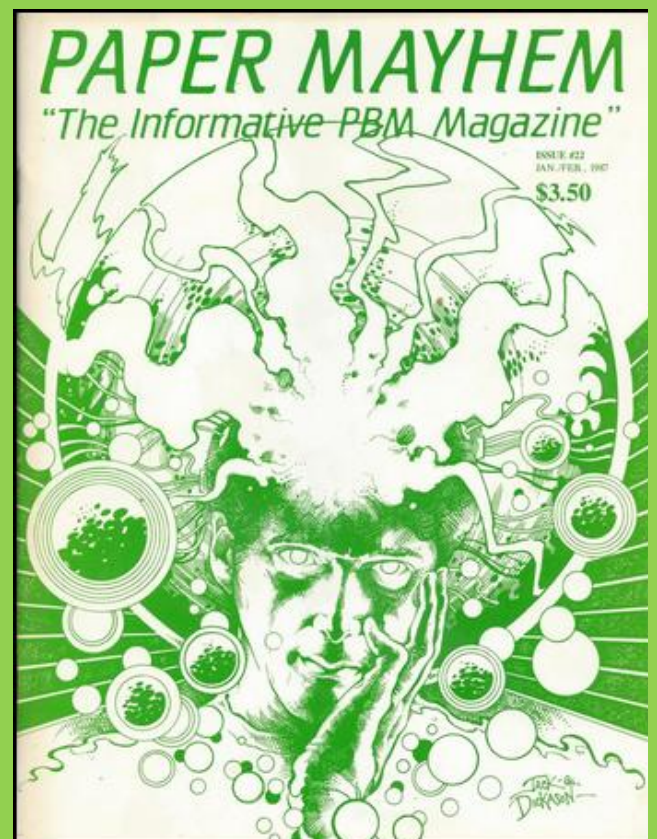
*"Blessings of the True One upon the Caliph,"* he half bowed, stepping out into the torrent.

*"The generals may have abandoned them,"* Shiriin continued to herself. *"But, vengeance is the gift of the True One."*

So the proverb goes.



## Do you remember?



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# No Rest for the Wicked

## A Duel2 Story

### Nile List

A good rest--long deserved, long delayed--beckoning me closer each day, reaching out for my weary bones...I was ready to finally lie down and sleep.

When I heard him bellow.

Worley M. Hobbit III. Star of the Dwes Eg arena sestet, bearer of the golden gladius, "Manager of the Season" 9 years running.

Retired. Like me.

Even retired, when Worley bellows, people come running.

I refuse to run for anyone, but I couldn't ignore him. He'd just get louder, and everyone else would come running from all directions, and the incessant sound of footsteps would irritate me to no end.

So, I got out my parchment and quill. I hadn't spoken to Worley since I lost the wager and left Caleam, but once I put words into ink, it felt like no time had passed since our last conversation.

"What do you want, old man?"

"Don't you miss it Nile?"

(I have to pause here and admit that, while I question the benefit of many so-

called technological improvements, long distance conversations are vastly easier with the new messenger pigeons. When I was dueling many years ago it took days to get a simple yes or no reply from someone in the next arena. Now you can exchange several messages in a day. It's almost like being in the same room with the person.)

"Miss what?" I asked, even though I knew exactly what he meant.

*"The sand in your boot. A thousand feet stomping the grandstands in the morning and a mist of blood falling gently over the evening. The glint of the sunset on a finely sharpened axe blade. Five strong youths who believe you can make them immortal. I'm talking about life!"*

Of course I missed it, but it's a young man's game. I finished that life years ago. I am retired now, just waiting for sleep to take me. "What do you want?"

*"Why, Mr. List, you speak as if we were strangers. Have you forgotten our years on the sand? Have you no memory of our blood oath? Must I remind you that we are blade brothers bound by combat?"*

*"For pity's sake, Worley, must you be so dramatic?"*

*"Yes! It makes life bearable."*

*"Fine. I'll play along. My dear Mr. Hobbit, it has been many a season since your voice rattled across the lowlands causing the chickens to lay spotted eggs, hence my surprise when it shook me from my well-deserved rest. I thought you were dead."*

*"Just sleeping."*

*"You sleep as much as the dead."*

*"Death is merely slumber's dreamless partner. Very restful, if you can rouse yourself from her arms."*

*"I wouldn't know about that. Everyone I've sent to her bunk is still napping there, and I have been too busy making deals with the living to fall into her embrace, although I find her more alluring with each passing moon. Do you think there is room for one more in her bed?"*

*"Her mattress is wide as the Rirorni plains. You can roll over twice and not bump elbows with another man. But as comfortable as her chambers may be, it*

*pains me to hear you speak this way. Clever Nile--so wily he could dodge death's kisses blindfolded--now seeking a place in her bed? You aren't well, friend. But I know what ails you, and I have a remedy."*

*"I've had my fill of wine and prostitutes, Worley."*

*"Blasphemy! But, you misconstrue my intentions."*

*"I'm tired, Worley. What do you want?"*

*"I want you to come back."*

*"To the valley?"*

*"No, you simpleton. To the arena."*

*"Listen, Hobbit, I may want to sleep, but I'm not entering death's bedroom through the arena gates."*

*"You've taken one too many mace hits to the head, Nile. Who would want to watch your old carcass duel anymore? I want you to manage a team."*

And there it was. The devil's offer.

I hadn't run a team since Caleam, since I walked away from all my teams and started writing training manuals. Giving up the sand was like cutting off my sword arm, but I had made a troll-sized



wager without checking all the angles. Of course I lost, and my forfeit was to leave the arena. To leave the whole game.

Not a season has gone by that I didn't feel the itch to gather five miscreants from the streets and teach them the ways of sword and shield. I could have worked under a false name, ran them in some backwoods independent city like Snowbound. No one would know, except me. And I gave my word.

Does that sound quaint to you? A man who built his career on the blood of others is concerned about holding up his end of a wager? It may not make sense if you haven't heard a broadsword whistle past your ear, or felt a spearhead rattling your buckler. You can always do something about the blade at your breast but if you don't have anyone to trust, the blade at your back is the one that will kill you.

Some people pray, but I gave up all trust in gods when my chin was still bare. Even if a duelist doesn't believe the gods punish the wicked, he believes in the edge of a blade. The arena is a world with few rules. We all had our feints, our jabs to the throat, our knees to the groin, but that was all on the sand. Once the armor was off, you needed friends. Even as managers we could scalp tickets or arrange a lopsided challenge. Hell, I would happily nudge the odds to fatten my purse, but I never break my word.

So I lost a bet and traded my sword for a

quill, moved to the back end of nowhere, and settled in to die the quiet death of the jaded. The money still came, more than I made in the arenas, and in wide varieties--eagles, astrums, chargers, lions--I don't care whose face or which animal adorns my coinage, but there are more interesting ways to earn it than inscribing the five starting positions for longswords.

**I was dying. Slowly. And I blamed Worley. Him and Princess Bethany.**

And I figure he blamed me. It was as much my fault, after all. I knew better than to take a sure thing without checking it out, but this was Worley M. Hobbit III! How could I lose?

*"How?"*

*"Simple as pie, Nile. The last Gaming Councilor who held a grudge against you died two cycles ago, and I called in a few favors. Your manager's license is clear and up to date."*

*"I can't believe it! This is...wait. I don't have a team. No, never mind. I can make a team out of monkeys if I have to. Where is my license? Still in Caleam?"*

*"I'm afraid there's a wrinkle. Caleam is closed."*

*"Closed? Our arena?"*

*"For remodeling. Trust me, it needs the work. You can pick up your license in a transfer arena called Blackstone."*

*"Sounds like a child named it."*

*"I can tell the Council that you're not interested..."*

*"You know I'll be there."*

*"It's just for a few moons, then you can transfer out and meet me in the new arena."*

*"You don't have a team in Blackstone?"*

*"Of course I do, but they're just a side project of pretty boys who please the crowd. They're shipping off to entertain the military soon. Now that I know you're joining me, I've focused all my efforts on a new team worthy of our reunion. I'll meet you in Seam."*

*"Seam? Like what a tailor sews?"*

*"Yes. There's a big crack in the ground."*

*"Who names places these days?"*

*"Who cares? There are hot springs! Remember the springs at Castle Andalusia? We can swim like when we were boys."*

*"Yes. I could do with a nice swim."*

I knew Worley was playing me. He didn't care if I wasted away in Taegskel or died

in Zukal with a dagger between my ribs, which meant he wanted something from me, and I was fairly certain what.

An answer.

I would gladly give my old friend anything I have, but I cannot grant him this request because long ago I vowed to keep a secret, and I never break my word.

+++++

**"No Rest for the Wicked" is part of an ongoing meta-fiction that, on the surface, tells the story of two aging duelists making one last run at fame and fortune in the arenas of Alastaria.**

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# Those 'other' PBM Games

Ira Lee Gossett

We have all seen the ad's for professionally run Play by Mail Games or E-mail more often than not, in this day and age. I have nothing bad in any way, shape, or form to say about them, and there are a number of them I would love to play, except for one thing, ... they cost money. Something that is quite often tight around the house.

But fear not, for there are 'other' games one can play.

There are a very surprising number of self-run games. A fact I can only put down to the rise of the internet. Anyone with access to a computer is now able to throw out a game idea and run with it. Whether or not they are any good or will last is something one must take with a grain of salt - but hey, it's free, so why not?

One source I've used a number of times is **Greg Lindahl's Play by Email (PBeM) & Play by Mail (PBM) List Index**. Originally this listing was set up by Bob Lindahl who I knew when he was running the '**The Sorcerer's Apprentice Fanzine**' back in the '80's . This is a game ad site with close to 1500 games listed on it. With the game listing broken up into various categories; Sci-Fi, Historical, Fantasy etc...

I've played in around a half dozen games

from the listings. Some have turned out to be more complex than I expected, and I've dropped; a couple have up and stopped, leaving me hanging (of course they were the ones I most wanted to play!); and one I played for close to 4 years, before it became too difficult for the GM to run and she let us know it was closing.

You take a lot more of a gamble with these types of games, since they're run as a fun side, not a business, but as I found with my long term game, they can be quite rewarding.

There are, of course, other sites, and with a little internet searching, they'll pop up for you.

You can also find; as I did, sites that cater to a specific game. In my case '**Tunnels and Troll's**'. For those that have never heard of 'T&T' (and I'm sure there are many), T&T is a simpler version of 'D&D'. The non-serious cousin, if you will. There are two sites I know of; 'Vin Ahrr Vin's TrollBridge' and a Yahoo group called 'Blue Frog Tavern'.

I'm in 2 games on Vin's. 1 has lasted

close to 3 years, and the other is still waiting to start. On Blue Frog Tavern, I'm once again in a game run by the same DM as the last game I played, so I'm looking forward to another fun adventure.

You can also find games on Facebook. I joined a T&T game there, and played for close to 2 years before dropping, as the pace became too quick for me. I prefer to go on FB only about once a day. For normal stuff, this is great, but with the game, I was finding a lot of posts since I last was on, and at times, actions had occurred while I was offline. I'd just rather be a PC, not an NPC.

One thing I've found is games such as these are an RPer's dream. The GM's want you to RP, and with the exception of the FB game (which, just because of the medium, frowns on LONG posts) they reward good RP.

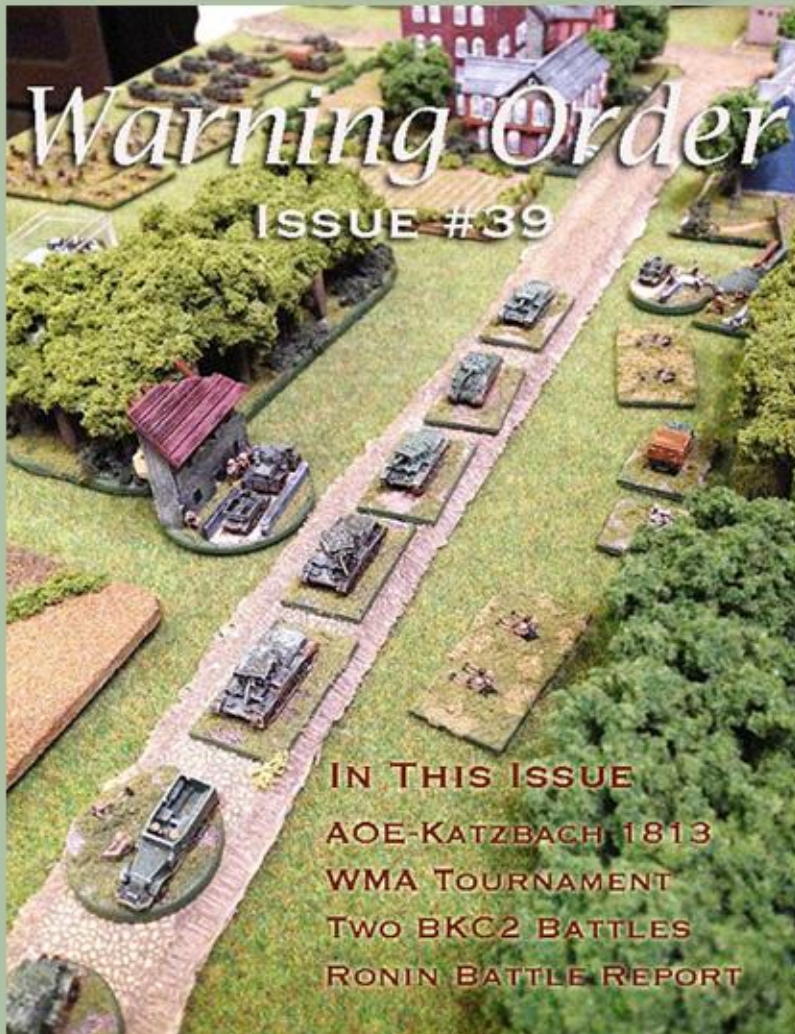
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**Suspense & Decision**



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# What's makes a successful game?

**Rob Harding**

It's an experience that readers of a certain vintage will know.

Seeing the postman approaching your house, waiting to hear the smack as a brown envelope hit the mat. Recognising the GM's hand writing from 15 feet away, and knowing for the next couple of days, you would be frantically making plans, your phone would be red hot talking to allies and potential enemies before sending your turn back, and repeating the cycle.

Only once in my PBM gaming history was I let down by the postal service. After waiting for a turn to arrive involving a critical battle, the brown envelope was a little thicker than normal. This didn't deter the aforementioned postman trying to cram it through my letter box, with the result half fell on the mat, and the other mangled half remained jammed.

I vividly remember picking up the half a turn, opening the door to confront the soon to be deceased postal worker by wielding the mangled wreck of a turn like a light sabre and

slicing him into small pieces.

(Actually, being English, what actually happened was I opened the door and apologised to him for the inconvenience, and spent the next 2 hours trying to tape it back together, again ...).

I digress - for me the game was **Tribes of Crane (UK)**, and after playing for 15 years, the experience finished in the 90's, when the game stalled.

At the time, Flagship was at the fore of promoting PBM gaming, and I dallied with other games, based on player reviews and ratings. A few games I played for a number of years, but others I would drop after 4-5 turns, because the game didn't grab me. Something was missing ...

With hindsight, for me, often the missing element was a lack of player interaction. Starting a new game and trying to grasp the rules and mechanics could be tough, but when letters - & later, emails - of introduction went unanswered, a PBM game would lose attraction for me. If I wanted to play a solo game with no interaction, by that time, I could fire up a computer and play one of the many RPG games - multiplayer gaming would come several years later.



Often when reading Suspense & Decision, a number of games peak my interest, but I find myself asking the question: What makes a successful game? How much of it is a well thought out game design, consistent GM quality, and how much is down to the players, themselves?

I've been playing a PBEM game, now, for 4 years. Each position will take me, on average, about 2 hours to complete the turn, on a bi-weekly cycle.

However, it's the 6-7 hours of communicating, between turns, with allies and other players in the game, which takes the game to a different level. It's the interaction. The medium may have moved with the times from letter & phone to email & Skype, but it's the content which keeps the interest and anticipation high.

The clap on the back for someone coming up with an ingenious plan (and wishing you had thought of it!). It's the good natured mickey taking, when somebody drops the ball and forgets to put in a crucial action with calamitous results. It's the moments when

somebody offers to take a hit, to allow others to reach a goal.

Ultimately – my question is – What makes a game successful?

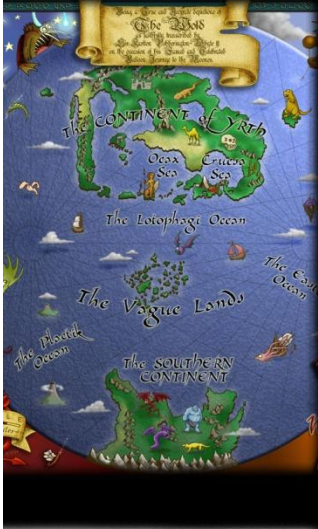
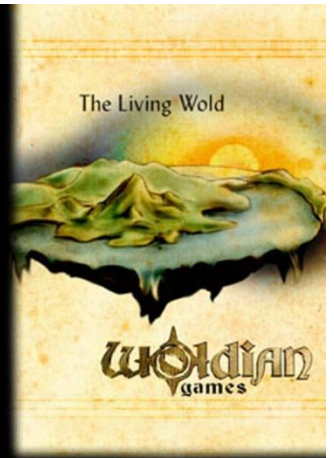
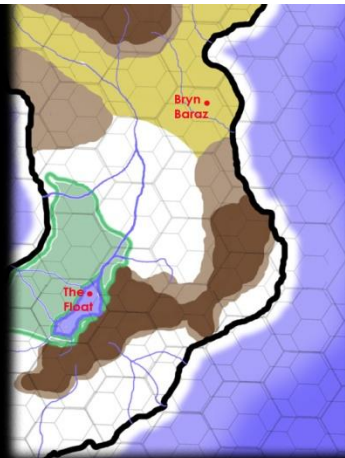
Is it the game, or is it the players?







Plateau City



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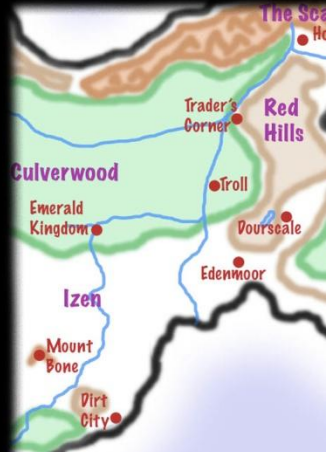
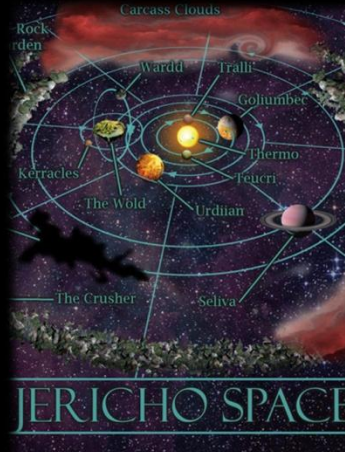
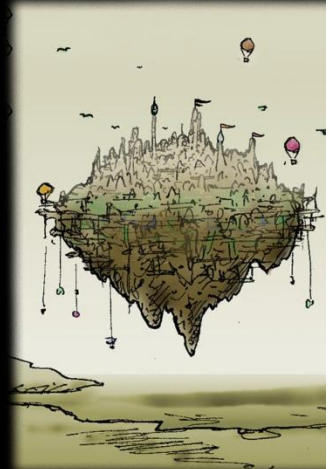
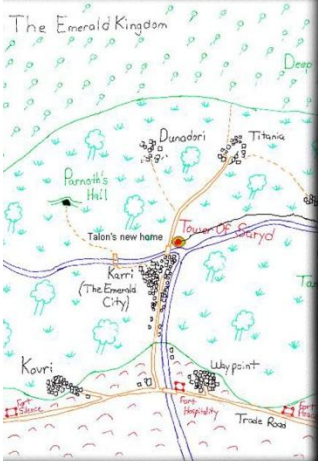
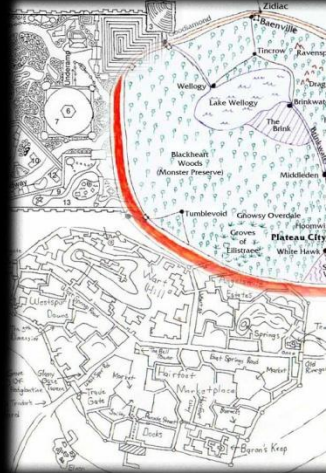
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# Welcome to Arkers (DM-8)

## Part IV (Sleeping with mosquitos)

Duel II Fiction by Julius A. Nicholson

Adoric Tyden climbed out of the cramped coach and stretched. He sighed with relief as blood pumped back into his legs that were free and uncurled. It would have been so much easier if they had all ridden horse. But Hildar was not only known for his girth, but for his cheapness as well. So instead he opted for the crapped buggy that Adoric had recently freed himself. The buggy was filled with all of the warriors of Hildar's Horde, their armour, weapons, camping gear, and food. Fortunately, the portly Hildar sat on the bench up front with the driver. Hildar's reputation of being a cheapskate was legendary, but he even hated to pay the driver of the coach. But he had no choice because the Coachman's guild forbade anyone from renting a coach and driving it themselves.

There was also protest from the stable of having to sleep outside instead of an inn.

"Why should we be packed into some bed bug infested hovel when we can sleep under the wide open sky?" Hildar replied. "And besides, the air and nature will be good for you city dwellers."

Never mind that he was just as much a 'city dweller' as the members of his stable. It didn't stop him from making his way to the closest town and sleeping under a nice roof and have a warm meal. The sad part is that if the Gladiatorial

commission hadn't furnished lodges for the participants of the tourney, a safe bet would be them "sleeping under the wide open sky" and then expected to fight the next morning.

But the gruelling trip was over and all anyone wanted to do was get to their room and crawl into a warm soft bed. Sleeping with mosquitos that were too stubborn to accept that summer was over tended to make one crave those kinds of things.

"Okay! No dilly dallying! Let's get this equipment stored. We are in Lodge 104. You can sleep all you want once we are settled. If you are hungry, and sleep can wait, supper will be served in three hours. But no one eats until everything is taken care of. Let's go!"

The members of the Horde grudgingly grabbed their things and followed the path that a wooden sign promised the lodges 101-110 existed. Who knew that Hildar was such a hard ass?

His mood had completely changed once

they arrived and he was around other managers. He was obviously putting on a show to impress the other managers.

As Adoric made his way to their lodge, he marvelled at the number of participants milling about. It looked as if every race or construct was represented in the lodging area. Some of the races he was sure weren't native to Alastari.

There were trolls, elves, orcs, and shewish giants walking about with humans of various nationalities. Adoric couldn't take his eyes off of two trolls who were sitting on two logs with another huge log acting as a table between them.

## The two trolls were having an arm wrestling match and a shewish giant was in the role of a referee.

There were several others standing around cheering the combatants on as they struggled against each other's power. Thick muscled green arms bulged at the power being exerted between the two and thick droplets of sweat began to pour from each of their brows.

Adoric was so busy watching the match that he wasn't watching where he was going. With a yelp Adoric clumsily staggered forward and barely caught his balance. Someone thought it was cute to put their foot out and tried to trip him.

"The phrase is 'Excuse me' human."

Adoric turned around to see who had made such a snide comment. Standing on the path was a dwarf. He had a thick black beard and equally thick black hair. It was wild and unkempt. The dwarf looked as if he had just jumped out of bed and decided to go for a walk. He had on a dingy white shirt and blue denim pants. His brown boots were well worn and covered from the dust of the road. Across his back was an axe nearly as big as he was.

"Sorry about that little fella. I didn't see you there." Adoric taunted. Would have said excuse me and given all of the niceties that were required. But he knew someone had stuck their foot out and tripped him. And that person was the dwarf in question. He had no intention of apologizing for this clown's behaviour. Adoric placed his bags on the group and placed his hand on his epee's pommel. The dwarf, not to be intimidated by this human turned full on to face this human and tucked his thumbs into his belt. Fortunately the commission had made it mandatory that all gladiators peace bond their weapons.

"Ho ho! That is a nice looking tooth pick you have there. Are you planning on cleaning your teeth with it after supper?"

No, my hairy little friend. It's my pig sticker. And what do you know; I have found a pig to sti..."

Adoric was stopped short with a smack to the back of the head. Adoric spun around quickly expecting one of the dwarf's friends to be backing up their

obnoxious stable mates. Instead he saw Ayrie Zile; his obnoxious stable mate.

“Why is it that every time you go somewhere, you get into fights?” Ayrie asked. He had a scowl on his face. This wasn’t absolutely true. Yes, Adoric had a run in with Blue Flak of the Steel Prophets. But that was in Arkers.

“You should take care of your stable mate” the Dwarf called out. “He’s a bit clumsy. I assume your manager brought him along to carry your bags. Gods help you if he is fighting.”

“Why you squatty little son of a bi...” Adoric said as he attempted to draw his epee. Only an inch of the blade had shown and he was preparing to charge at the dwarf.

But before he could, Ayrie Zile threw both arms around him and pulled him away.

“Sorry friend. He is a bit touchy after the long ride. Don’t mind him. See you on the sands.”

The dwarf simply nodded and walked away. He had better things to do than beat the crap out of this upstart.

“Why did you do that?” Adoric exclaimed. “I could have taken him.”

“I doubt that” replied Ayrie. “For one thing, you dodge like a snail and you have the parry ability of wet parchment. Second; it is illegal to fight outside of the games. Not even fist fights are allowed. If you do, you are disqualified. If you are

disqualified, Hildar will keep your pay for four cycles. I did you a favour.”

“Thanks, but he still needs a beating.”

“If you are lucky, you might get a match with him. The matches in the tourneys are random. But remember that you are completely green. You don’t have one fight under your belt. So you will fight in the rookies. In order for you to meet your dwarven friend, he has to be a rookie too. So, the odds of you getting him are pretty high. Just let it go. He seemed a bit of a jerk anyway. ”

“Yeah. I guess you’re right.” Adoric conceded as he watched the dwarf walk off into the village. He still wanted to smack him though.

Just then Adoric was about to pick up his bags and continue to the lodge, he saw something that caused him to do a double take. The sight was so unbelievable that the young man took a step forward and to get a closer look.

There, across the street was a shambling mass of decomposed flesh. It walked with the step stagger trudge of someone whose muscles and tendons were too weak to support their mass.

The putrid fleshed being walked up to three warriors standing around talking.



They all had their weapons peace bonded too. Adoric was about to call out when the warriors turned, shouted, and ran over to zombie and gave him a hug. Adoric could only sit there with his mouth hanging open. From behind him he heard Ayrie Zile chuckle.

"Welcome to the All Hallows Eve's Tourney; the night the dead come to life. It is a chance for managers of tournament champions to either resurrect one of their dead warriors, or make one of their living warriors immortal! All Dead Tourney Tournament Champions will be resurrected and granted immortality; Tournament Victors of the Dead Tourneys will only be

resurrected. That is why that thing is here. Its manager must want him back badly. "

Adoric listened to his team mate, but he felt a shiver move up his spine as he watched another group of warriors greet their dead comrade. It was a bit eerie and he simply wanted to be elsewhere.

"Let's get out of here. I need to drop my bag off and get some rest."

"Good idea", said Ayrie Zile. "You look dead tired."

Adoric looked at him and sighed.

"Don't tell me that you weren't thinking it." Ayrie sheepishly smile

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

# Suspense & Decision

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# Galac-Tac

## Quick-Start Guide

Davin Church

The Galac-Tac game rules can be a bit daunting, at first glance. If you'd like to start playing right away and spend some time later learning about all the details, here's how to get a running start on playing the first few turns.

Take a look at your initial report – perhaps a printed copy will help you begin. You'll find your Home World listed (with its location on the far left at the top of the report) and the ships that you already have there. On that same line to the right is listed the amount of "money" that you have available to spend. The lines below that list all the starting ships you have at your Home World. Each one starts with its ship number and type code (both are important). You'll also find two maps in your report. Put aside the full galaxy map (the one with the tiniest print) for now, and look at the other one, the quadrant map. This map shows your own location in the center (with an "H"), with the stars scattered around that are near to you. These are the stars you'll concentrate on, at first.

Star locations are listed in the form XX-YY. XX is **down** and YY is **across**. The galaxy wraps around from side to side and top to bottom, so there are no edges. Coordinate 99 is right next to coordinate 00, so if you find yourself near a numerical "edge" you can go right

past it and the numbers just start over. Distance calculation is simplified, where horizontal, vertical, and diagonal steps are all only a single unit of distance.

For the easiest start, just ignore all the rules for designing new ships, and go with the ships you've been given. The "FX" ships are for small-cargo transport and colonization, and the "SC1" ships are for scouting and charting, to help with colonization. Colonization is important, because it claims star systems as your own, and triples the amount of raw materials (Production Value, or PV) that each star system produces.

### **Turn #1**

You should name your empire on your first turn. The first action has been reserved for you, for that purpose – just fill in the name you've selected in the first empty box.

**In the very beginning of the game, your primary goal will be to create colonies.**

The first action you'll need to use is CHART, to identify the base PV of stars near you. You must chart a star, before

you can colonize it. Here's what the CHART command looks like:

**CHART** *ship# location*

Find all your "FX" (cargo) ships on your report, and issue a CHART command to each one, giving each ship a different location near your Home World. Look them up on your map, to see what's nearby. In addition, use your "SC1" (scout) ships to help you find additional juicy stars. Send them out with CHART orders, as well, to different locations from the cargo ships, to find the best places to send your next set of ships.

That's the most important thing, right off the bat, but you're going to need more ships, right away – cargo ships, in particular. So, the next thing you should do is start building some more with your starting money (called PI, for Production Inventory). They won't be completed and ready to use, until next turn, so start on them, now. That uses the BUILD command, and this is what it looks like:

**BUILD** *location FX Freighter*

Use your Home World as the construction location. This tells it to build an "FX" (a light cargo ship), and name it "Freighter". You may give it up to three ship names at once, and repeat the command, as needed. You'll probably want around a dozen new cargo ships to work with, next turn, and perhaps a few additional scouts, if you like.

Just that much – a few CHART and BUILD orders – will get you started and well on your way to a solid economic

base. If you want to throw in some extra orders, by all means, do so, but these few simple orders will give you a good start on a healthy empire.

## **Turn #2**

On your second turn, you'll actually start constructing your economic system. To begin with, the ten FX ships you sent out on the first turn will have charted their respective stars (you will see their PV listed on your report) and those will now be ready for colonization. They need to be given the COLONIZE command, as follows:

**COLONIZE** *ship# location name*

That will start the colonization process, which will take two turns to complete. The new colony's name is optional.

The new cargo ships you built last turn will now be ready to use. You will want to start with the locations that your scout ships charted last turn, and colonize most or all those with the same COLONIZE command, as above. Ships sent from your Home World with COLONIZE orders will automatically load the required 10 PI (from your Home World PI stockpile), move to the named system, and then will start the colonization process, next turn.

If you've built more cargo ships than required for colonizing, you'll want to

send them out to do charting duty, like your first set of cargo ships. But, first make sure they have 10 PI on board (like your original cargo ships started with), so they're ready to colonize, as soon as they have charted. Do that with the LOAD command, which looks like this:

**LOAD ship# 10 PI**

Then, send those extra cargo ships out to other nearby stars with CHART orders, like you did with the first set of cargo and scout ships.

Also, the scout ships you sent out last turn have done their duty here, and are now ready to spread out and find some more stars to CHART, so send them exploring, as well.

## ***The Next Few Turns***

As your colonize orders are completed, your new colonies will appear on your turn report, along with the ships that are present at those locations. You will then want to establish regular supply runs, to bring the raw materials (PV) back to your Home World every turn to be converted into PI. When each colony is ready, start up shuttle runs, either with the colonizing cargo ships or with larger cargo ships that you will build, as needed. (See the manual on how to use the SHUTTLE command.)

Your starting "FX" cargo ships can't hold as much PV as you're likely to have available, so building pairs of some larger cargo ships (e.g. "FXX" or "FXXX") to shuttle with is a good idea, so that

you can pick up all the available PV, every turn. Alternating shuttles in each pair will bring the PV back home to produce PI, and will give you a steady income to do more expansion and start building warships in preparation for the inevitable conflicts that will occur, as you expand.

It is possible that you will encounter other empires in your early exploration. Usually, such early encounters will not involve actual combat, but any encounter will prevent your ships from carrying out their assigned orders, and you will need to issue them new orders.

While you're expanding your empire in your first few turns, you should have plenty of opportunity to go through the rule book, to see how combat works, how to design your own ships, and what other actions are available for managing your empire and your fleets.

Good luck and have fun!

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# Ultima Online: Renaissance

Jim Kemeny

I have not been in **Ultima Online** for many years. I had a chance to change that in 2015, when one of the private shards made it possible to download a version that could be played on a Mac. I decided to try it.

I knew that there were several private shards, all of which had the main aim of not creating the division between Felluca and Trammel. See <http://www.uogamers.com/community/index.php?threads/108448/>. But **UO:R** had the big advantage of not having to use boot camp to create a partition to install a windows programme in that half of the computer.

I think this website is unique in having had a Mac OS X alternative to MS Windows. And the website is clearly well organised, as is its forum. It had an equivalent to New Haven, in an island called Occllo. Characters started there have "young" status, to give starting players the chance to train up characters. Then they can use the Occllo Moongate to go to another part, like Trinsic, Empath Abbey and Vesper/Minoc.

The game attracts players interested in player v player (PvP) but there are also roleplayers and even roleplayer guilds. A large proportion of players are North American, but with a player base of

some 600+, there are always other groups.

"Macroing" was so common, as to be normal. I didn't do any macroing, but I let my characters grow and develop at their usual pace, trying to build a story around this progression. I've always done this in **UO**, but it is harder in **UO:R**.

This early part of developing a character is always the most interesting and challenging part of **UO**, the classic sandbox game, the first of its kind having been going for some 18 years.

When I joined **UO:R**, I had an old OS X (Mountain Lion), but after 3 years, I made the mistake of upgrading to the latest OS X (El Capitan). I would never have done that, if I had known that **UO:Renaissance** wouldn't work in El Capitan.

Playing in **UO:R** needed me to make adjustments. But there are clearly those who resent even the small compromises that are made, and who referred to "Trammel Dorks". For an example of this



kind of thinking, see <http://uorforum.com/threads/if-trammel-is-the-destination-just-how-far-along-the-path-are-we>. But I suspect this extreme response was unusual in **UO:R**, the bulk of responses to the question (30 responses) chose the lowest possible end of the scale (10%). Interestingly, the question did not provide for an alternative of 0%!

Those few weeks I had in **UO:R** gave me the insight that, after the stroke I had in 2010, my typing was so poor that it made it hard to "talk" online. So, it confirmed that my decision was right, not to try to return to **UO**. But I enjoyed visiting the old places, especially the city of Trinsic and Empath Abbey, a glimpse of the enjoyable time I had in **Ultima Online**.

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Bernd Jaehnigen

You are a member of the PBM/Turn-Based Gaming elite.

You are reading this magazine, which is basically a deep dive into an obscure gaming discipline. You "get it" — you understand the gist and the undertones of "suspense" and "decision". You are here for an immersive experience, either through tense narrative, comprehensive simulation, extended diplomatic maneuvering, or supply chain tinkering. And in all likelihood, you experience difficulty in finding local gaming action at this level.

Your friends don't game. Or they do game, but they stick with Monopoly and poker. Or they play modern boardgames like Catan, but don't like games which are more involving or complex. Or they show interest in such games, but can't possibly find the time to play them. Or they are EAGER to play such games any time you want to hang out at the [Compleat Strategist](#) or the local convention, and you suddenly find you don't want to get near them.

Luckily we have our little niche hobby. Get all the gaming you want, at the deep level you want it, with a plurality (if not an abundance) of players ready to sit across from you at the virtual table — what's not to love? One of the main problems we face (other than dropouts)

is getting more people into the games we love.

We need to move beyond a mere plurality. We want a vibrant player community that boosts games, supports moderators, builds enthusiasm, and reinforces all the good stuff PBM provides.

So, dear elite gamer, let's get to work on that! Here are some things you can do.

The easiest and quickest route is to post actively to forums. Many games and moderators run dedicated forums, but I have lost count the number of times I've come across a dead forum, with the last post dated years ago. It is pervasive enough that our dear editor Charles has run an intermittent feature called Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of PBM, in which he finds these web communities and assesses whether they yet live.

Some moderators have moved their forum to the playbymail.net site, not only to take advantage of a free space, but also to catch the notice of a wider



audience of PBMophiles. I hesitate to call for a grand consolidation of PBM fora because I think diversity is healthy, but I do think other forums ought to link and cross-link frequently with this one and help pollinate.

Posting to forums in itself can span a range of energy levels. If you reply consistently and promptly to new posts, it brings joy to the original poster of a thread. It takes a moment, and the validation it provides pays many dividends. Post reviews of your favorite games for an added kick. Or post about an incident that happened in a game that highlights why you love this genre.

If you're really up for it, you can post continuous updates showing off a game you're currently playing. This sort of "open gaming" won't work in all situations — you don't want to tip your opponents off to the fact that your starfleet is composed of rusty asteroid trawlers. But when possible, it can be immensely rewarding. When Charles and I locked horns in our Far Horizons game, played out on the forum, the creative posts became a game in their own right. We even managed to inspire others to spontaneously join in. It was a relatively simple game, I was losing, and it was cut short, but I count it as one of my top 10 PBM game memories.

Another option would be to post an "after action report", as is frequently seen in the august halls of [BoardGameGeek](#). Play a PBM game as you normally would, but keep a careful log of each turn --

your orders, your decision points, your secret plans and anxieties. Then post it with a delay of several turns, to protect the guilty. Or save it up for [one long session report](#), complete with screenshots or scans!

Of course, if you're going to draft a long piece like that, you might as well submit it to this magazine for publication. (Full disclosure — that's kind of what I did.) We need to fill an issue every month, and everyone would love to hear about your ambush of the troglodytes on the Plains of Ra. Or post a collection of diplomatic messages.

My college gaming group once played Diplomacy (arguably the grandfather of all modern gaming), with the rule that all diplomacy had to take place via written notes, or in one of two separate rooms equipped with tape recorders. We went back after the weekend-long game concluded, reviewing the backstabbing and double-dealing with hearty guffaws. Such are the seeds of great PBM articles.

If you're playing on a team/tribe/eternal-space-alliance game like [Phoenix:BSE](#), why not post excerpts from the newsletters and blogs your teammates are doubtless producing in abundance every turn? You might think it's just esoterica of no interest to the lay audience, but you'd be wrong. You might end up recruiting new players! Or just draft up a direct recruitment pitch to be posted as either article or full-page ad on these glossy pages.

Finally, pulling back a bit from some of these lofty heights of community participation, you could, uh, "write a letter". Letters to the editor have been a great tradition in magazine history going back to when Korg chiselled his first missive in Better Caves and Cudgels some ten thousand years ago. Write specific responses to articles you liked, or didn't like! Quote a line from an article and elaborate on it in some way -- your words will go down into our collective permanent record. Try it once, and see how addictive the mighty pen or the bully pulpit can be!

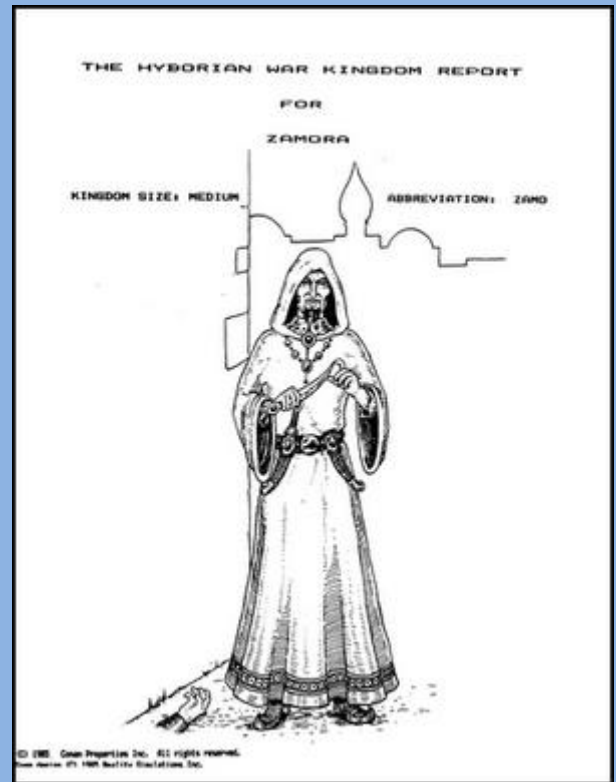
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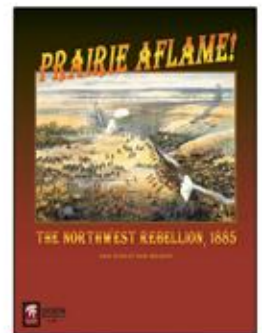
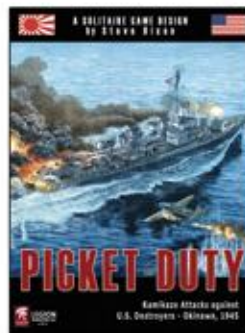
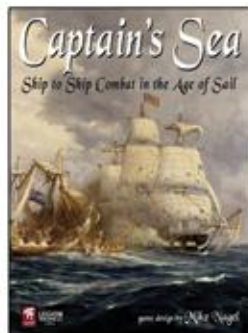
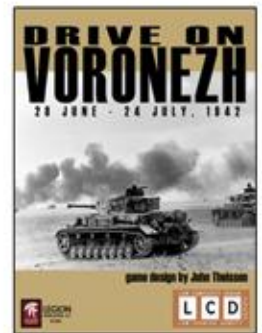
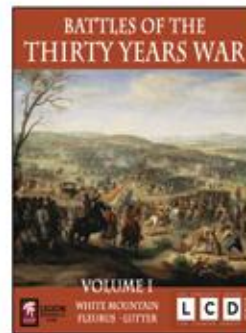
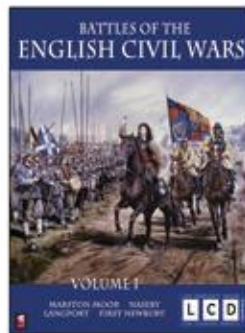
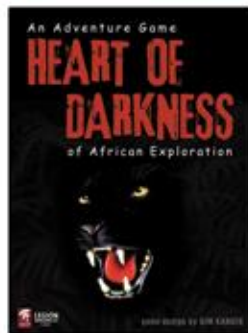
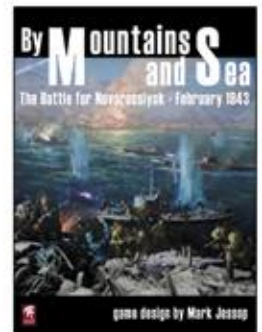
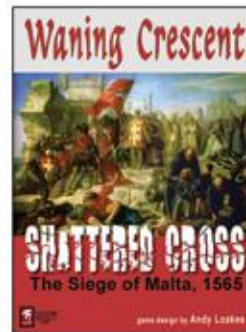
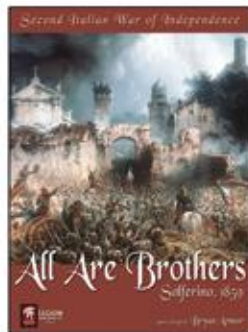
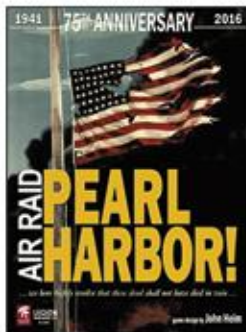
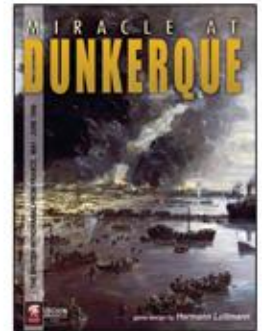
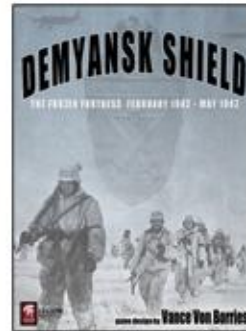
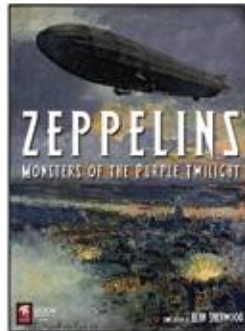






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# PBM Activity Corner

## News, Developments, & Bragging Rights

From Game Companies and Game Moderators

**NOTE:** Apparently, there was no news in any sector of the entire PBM realm, since our last issue.

It is quite possible that this is due to the staff of Suspense & Decision magazine not actively sending out an e-mail specific to this exact purpose.

The possibility of a planetary shield of some sort is being investigated, a shield which specifically inhibits game companies and game moderators from taking the initiative and sending in news and developments on their own about their games and their companies.

Regardless of the cause or causes, Suspense & Decision magazine is proud to present to you - our esteemed readers - this public service message, that we might all benefit from contemplating the possibilities of what could have been, but was not meant to be.

We would also like to thank you for reading our magazine, in spite of those occasions when and where we could have done a better job.

By the time that this issue makes its way to you, Halloween 2015 will have come and gone. We hope that you had a safe and enjoyable time marking this festive occasion!

If you opted to dress up for Halloween, we invite you to send in a photo of you in your Halloween best. ***It is so ordered!***

Have you visited these gaming communities?



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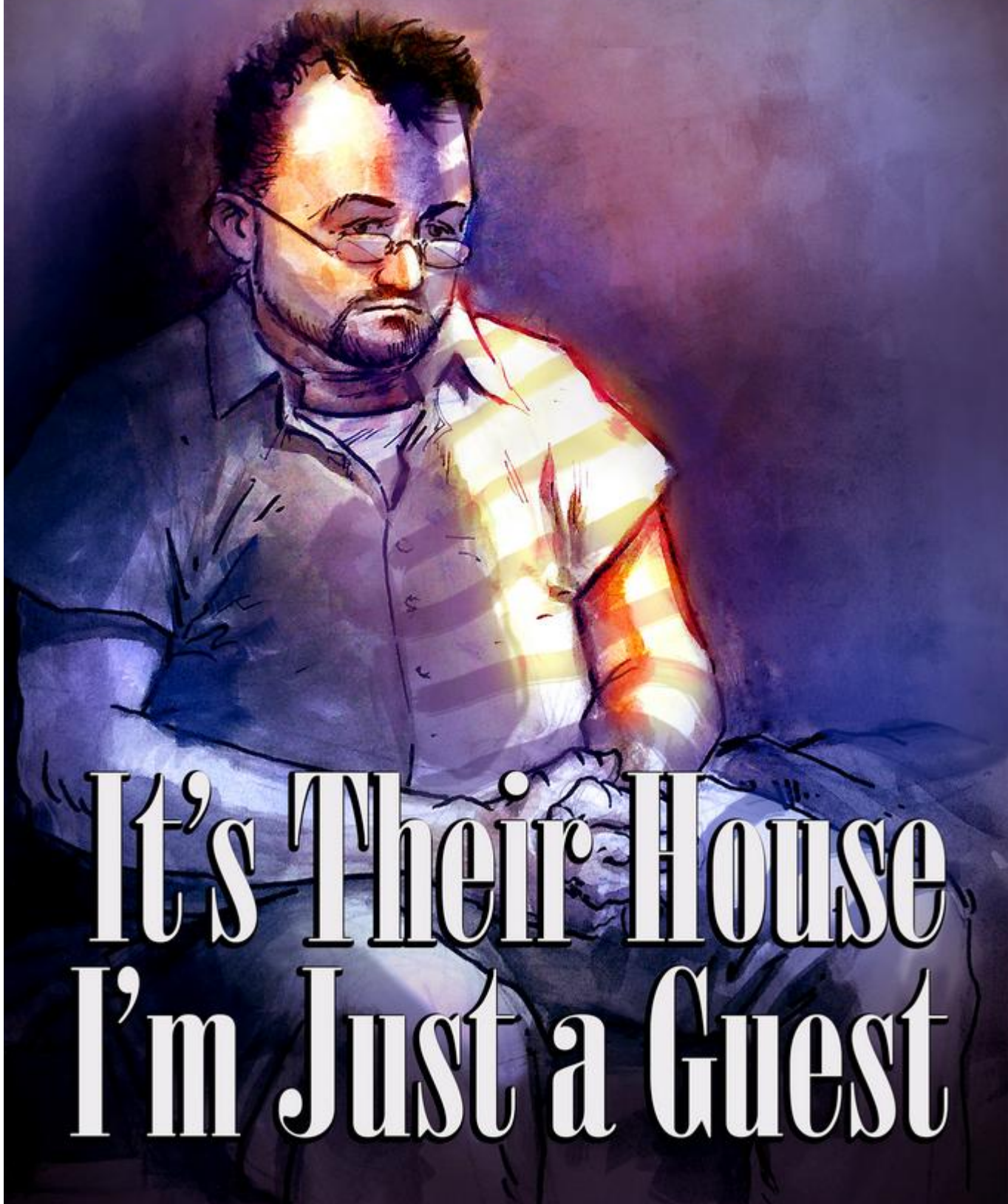
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# DOUGLAS KENT



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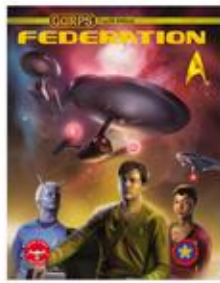
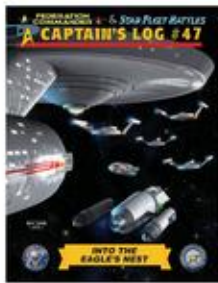
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## And So Much More!

Whether it is *Captain's Log* that supports all of our games or *Star Fleet Battle Force*, a non-collectible card game, or our free e-zines, we have lots to interest you. Check us out!



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# Mini-View # 2

## An Interview in Miniature

### Question for Issue # 11

*What do you believe to be the best way or ways of re-growing the player base of Play-By-Mail (PBM) games? If you were tasked with that undertaking, how would you seek to accomplish such?*

I would therefore say that the only realistic option for growing the player base is to start appealing to the vast numbers of online gamers.

Phoenix, having evolved to be completely playable through a browser allows us to market it as a permanent browser-based game. This larger genre is supported by ranking websites. By rewarding our players for voting for us, we have seen constant throughput of sign-ups and growth in the player base.

It is slow, but the in-depth nature of Phoenix can make it feel impenetrable to new sign-ups. Terms like learning cliff are bandied about, so we are pleased that there are still people out there that are willing to give a game a few weeks, to see if they like it.

If other PBM companies are making the transition, then there may well be a stronger online sub-culture formed. This can only be a good thing.

**- Mica Goldstone,  
KJC Games**

-----  
The resurgence in board games are, I

think, instructive.

Make attractive looking games that are both visually pleasing, have quality documentation and build complexity of rules that can be discovered by novices.

Why do PBM companies think it's OK to put out games that look and feel like they were made in the 1990s? This is especially true of web games that have learned nothing about user experience or design. Or rule books that seem to have been published using a 1980s word processing application.

Make it easy to get into a game and mitigate against having players drop, by building game systems that are social spaces that allow players to come and go. To some extent, this also means



better non-player entities that are engaging. Players should be able to be the focus of the story action, but the narrative should be bigger than any individual player's position.

Another important lesson from modern board game design for closed games: Move away from the old style win conditions that make it worth nobody's real time to keep playing (*except to be good sports*), at some intermediate stage in the game. A well-designed game will have challenges at every stage, and the opportunity for strategies that benefit in early, middle, and late phases. The final tally should not be so obvious that the victor is already globbing everything up, and there's no incentive to keep playing.

Finally, if we want to reach a new generation of players, we need to find ways of engaging with them where they are, rather than where we older veterans of the old PBMs like to hang out. If we're not using social media to keep players abreast of in-game events, we're ceding ground to the likes of Candy Crush and Farmville.

**Are we so snooty to think that thoughtful games with complex rules are beyond the generation born in the 90s and 00s?**

I guess the problem is that PBMs are still in the bedroom design games - the work

of sole genius, who naturally lack all the relevant skills to make modern entertainment products. What about actually building multi-disciplinary teams to tackle a genre, together? A game to revive the genre and appeal to a broader market might be a paradigm shift.

**- Sid Razavi,  
Phoenix: BSE player  
1995-to-1998 and 2008-to-2015**

-----  
At the moment, I think the best way of increasing player numbers is word of mouth, but that means good customer service, and keeping games balanced and interesting for existing players (so that they spread the word), while making it possible for new 'Apprentice' players to make a good go of things, which is obviously the second half of that equation.

Some games are more suited to that than others. We're lucky at *Harlequin Games*, in that *Legends* is not one, long, ongoing game - and that new games start fairly frequently (and even fresh modules from time to time), so that players can always join a game early enough that they are not left far behind.

Also, we try to make sure that new players get a more experienced player to act as a mentor for them, and we provide Apprentices with protection from Player vs Player activity, until they have got themselves familiar with running in the Player vs Environment situation (which often takes until their second

game).

But, setting up a game and balancing the ability of the various factions, when you have a diversity of player experience, is probably one of the trickier aspects.

We tend to give players a small in-game reward, if they let the GM place them into factions (to improve the game balance), to encourage the strong players, and give them a better (more challenging) game, than if they all ended up on the same side.

I think that's probably the strongest effect on retaining existing players and recruiting new ones.

- **Edward Lane,**  
**Harlequin Games**

I don't really know how to accomplish it, but I think the key will have to involve introducing younger players to the genre (well, younger than most of us, anyway). Virtually all of the younger generation seems to be thoroughly immersed in the fast-action, quick-reflexes, instant gratification kind of on-line gaming out there, and it surely can be addictive.

But there's bound to be a small percentage of younger players that are disappointed in that style of gaming, and

would rather spend their time thinking out their turns. Trying anything they can think of at random, just to die off and respawn to try something else, has got to get boring after a while, for many of them. We need to let them know that the "old ways" can offer alternatives they may like.

Of course, getting the message to them is the big problem. I haven't got any good ideas, other than the painfully inefficient word-of-mouth method. Perhaps someone else has come up with options?

- **Davin Church**  
**Talisman Games**





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# Down the Whirlpool

## Reader Feedback

### Assorted Readers Speaking Out via E-mail and the Web

Congrats -- nice job and welcome back!

Lee Kline  
President of Reality Simulations, Inc.  
=====  
Nice job on issue 10! Really excellent work!

Bernd Jaehnigen  
Associate Editor of Suspense & Decision  
=====  
Greetings,

Just some thoughts as I read issue # 10.

1. Good issue, I enjoyed most of it.
2. Please consider having a column, or a page, or something, where all of the upcoming game related conventions for the next 18 months can be posted. Learning about a con that's too soon to be able to arrange to attend is irritating.
3. I would like GM's to consider putting together a 'Briefing Book' on each game that has been written about in any publication (especially Suspense & Decision). In the 'book' would be a link to a copy of the article, or whatever that talks of the game. This would really be useful for potential players that read an ad in S&D and want to learn more about the game without having to do a lot of research. Links to the briefing books

could be part of the advertisements.

4. I may not get my Reader Survey response finished in a timely manner (or at all, as has happened in the past) so am including answers to parts of the survey.

5. An awards system for PBM/PBEM/TBG would be useful if instead of picking most popular that week, it listed the games that had earned labels of: Great Game, Good Game, Good Game but still needs Tweeking, and Work in Progress that shows real Promise. Or something like those.

6. New pbm game created? How about this? Faster than Light space travel has NOT been discovered. Earth is doomed because of 'X' and has a 20 year advanced warning. Massive Relocation Ship(s?) (MRS) built in space. Each MRS holds over 1 million crew and passengers plus animals/cargo. With passengers in cold sleep ship moves to earth-like planet that appears without intelligent race, yet appears livable. On arrival in orbit the passengers depart the ship in about 400 single-use-shuttles that each carry 2500 people + cargo. Shuttles spread out and settle across the globe. 400 new centers of human life are established, and population centers with farms, mines, etc built. Each population

center reflects the culture of the community on Earth that sponsored that 0.25% of the Ship.

Thanks for the effort you put in so we can enjoy S&D. I certainly consider it a great thing you are doing.

Glenn Harrold

=====

Grim,

First, congratulations and praise for getting your last issue out after a year away. And to your wondering whether it helps the hobby, well, stop wondering. It does.

Now here comes a different perspective on several issues you raised, or that I have previously discussed with you.

I don't really know what you mean by the lack of advertising creativity your advertisers are showing. I think these were the best looking ads you've had. Do you mean you want to see Flash animation? Can you even support that?

I actually do not favor the 100+ page content, and obviously it puts a burden on you and yours. I'd suggest more like 30 pages plus the ads, and to give editorial direction to contributors, like articles should be between 1000 and 2000 words, and that you reserve the right to slice and dice. There's always next issue (Part 2) if some writer wants to go into great depth on what happened in a game. Honestly, I haven't felt up to reading an eight page article on a game I know nothing about. Wouldn't that make

the production of S&D quite a bit easier? I suggest trying maybe to cultivate several regular writing contributors that you trust, that contribute maybe every other issue, along with some new writers/contributions in a given issue. But don't sweat the sheer weight. Maybe it's just my personality - I prefer concise, cogent writing that drives to a distinct conclusion or two.

I would think the game company is much better served by having maybe 1000 words on what the heck their game is like. Establishing a format to allow readers to compare and choose their new game might be what is most useful. Style, turn around, genre, pricing, community size, game length, number of players per game, open ended or victory conditions, etc. For example, I'd like your readers to know at Alamaze we have 22,000 player posts on our forum and have started over 140 games in the last 2.5 years, so about a game a week, and our pricing is about \$2 a turn, that runs and is emailed exactly at the deadline which is about 7 turns a month and we are constantly improving process and developing new formats.

The insistence on calling the hobby "PBM", as in "play by mail" I think works entirely against your and your advertisers hope for expanding the hobby. It's just silly. I suppose a couple companies still mail turns via snail mail, but that is certainly not the future. We don't call an I-phone a telegram or a Ferrari a fast buggy. Yes, those of us that are old enough to have played

before the internet know the term, but it certainly isn't driving young, new players into the complex, turn based strategy gaming hobby.

Back to the main point – glad you are back, Grimfinger, and Suspense and Decision!

Rick McDowell  
ALAMAZE  
[www.alamaze.co](http://www.alamaze.co)

=====  
I think every game you play is a balance between the effort required and the reward you get.

Sometimes life crunches you, so the effort of filling out a turn sheet seems daunting, and you let the game go because you just can't keep up.

Other times events in the game (or life) suck some of the fun out of the game, so the 'reward' diminishes.

More simply, you drop when it's more work than fun. That calculus gets revisited every turn by every player to some degree. So as a consequence, a game that isn't designed with dropouts in mind, isn't going to fare well.

That's doubly true for GMing postal games. That is typically a LOT of work, and initial motivation can peter out quickly, and games fold a few to a dozen turns in...

Ry Schwark

Currently only playing in Agema Games (Glory of Kings and Napoleonics)

=====

Nice to see issue 10 !! Well done.

Colin Danks

=====

Grim,

It usually takes me about a week to get through an issue, hence the delay in the feedback.

In short it was worth the wait !

Favourite articles being those on Alamaze and Tribes of Crane. Having been a Crane (uk) player for many years I found myself going through the list ticking off the lines I've seen and heard in letters and at pubmeets.

General Comment

Looking back over the issues a recurring theme is how do we get new players into pbm.

Having read the books and watched the series can you imagine the interest and player base if somebody got the rights to a Game of Thrones pbm game ? ...

Regards

Rob Harding

=====

Thanks for putting together this excellent collection of PBM material. It's truly a unique publication.

Nile List

=====



Many thanks, great looking magazine.  
Well done.

Pete Jones

=====

Glad to see you are back.

Crashem

=====

Thanks for the Blurb on  
gothichammer.com

I liked the article on player drop  
outs..... That was always a big problem  
for pay to play games (even for free ones  
these days).

Bone

=====

thanks you, still reading it

on a side note have you considered doing  
a podcast on PBM?

Lord Pessum Ire

=====

Good to see you back - another great  
issue

Ando

=====

Nice surprise to see a recruitment add  
for GTT. Have to work on that link  
though.

Ike

=====

I would suggest a condensed version of  
SSS would be great ongoing content for  
your magazine. Contact Kang. His humor  
translates across all races. Well hard to  
tell sometimes if he is trying to be funny  
in some cases, but that just makes it  
funnier.

Crashem

=====

Hadn't realised it had been so long since  
the last one!

Jason

=====

Yea there was a long wait they did not  
know if another was coming out, but  
seems they have some new blood.

Kingmaker

=====

Thank-you! I have enjoyed reading all of  
the previous issues and look forward to  
this one.

Silverlord

=====

Without even opening the issue yet, I am  
very happy Charles / Maximus /  
Grimfinger has resumed his magazine  
covering our hobby.

RyVor

=====

I agree! I didn't realize how much I enjoyed reading it until it wasn't there anymore. Very happy to see its return.

Gamejunkie

=====  
I've never looked at the magazine before - it looks interesting. But I am most interested in what appears to be an RSI ad. An ad for a PBM game - that seems to show the tables at a FTF tournament. And, even better, one rather attractive looking female at the tournament. Now, so far I have only been to one FTF, but I don't remember anyone looking like that there!

Nomad

=====  
Looks good.

Longshot

=====  
I thought the new issue was pretty good - with lots and lots of colorful ads. There are still a lot of games out there to play.

The Consortium

=====  
Everybody on here probably already knows how awesome it is that there's a publication dedicated to PBM. But, in case there's a person who doesn't...

This is an awesome publication dedicated to play by mail games with articles written by players about their

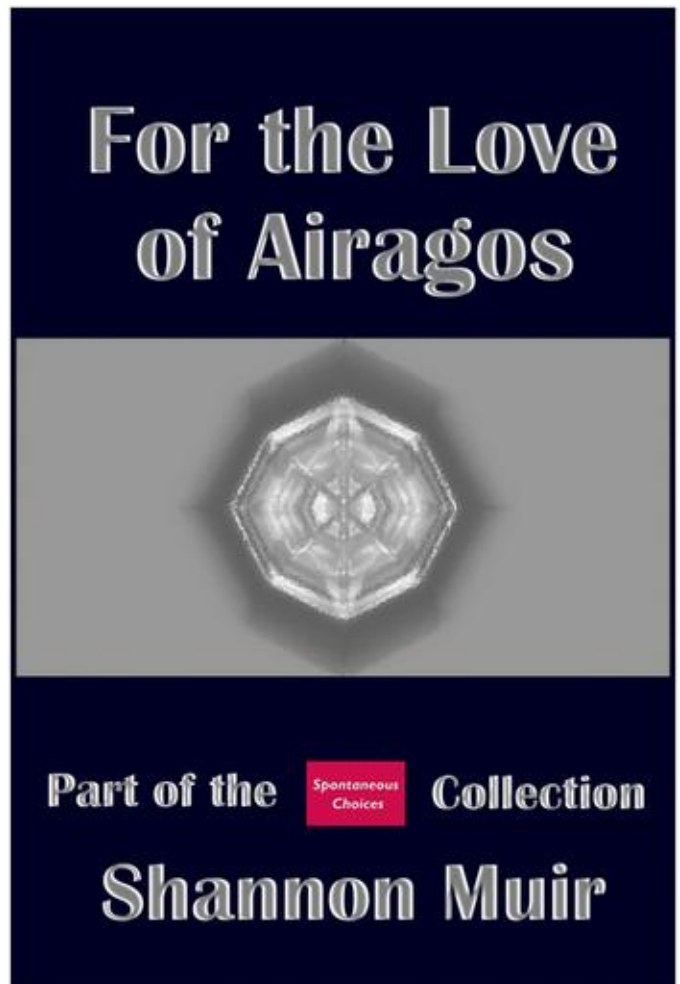
experiences with the games. This is a really good resource for finding other games, and I'm glad the editors took the time to put it together. If you like Duel2 and would like to try some other games, give this issue a look because there are quite a lot of other games to try.

ExoticV8

=====  
Good read, well done and thanks.

Ira Gossett

=====







# Dante's Inferno

## The Trials and Tribulations of Publishing a PBM Magazine Charles Mosteller

Delay comes in many shapes and sizes. It takes many forms, each more time-consuming than the one that preceded it.

I am vexed by the clock, its hands leering at me, no matter when I pause to see what it has to say. Time is my enemy. It plots my demise - and with it, the demise of this magazine.

To try something new is to incur delay. To tread the known route is to embrace the delays that accompany it. How to break out of these chains that bind me to this magazine's detriment? I am at wit's end.

The beautiful thing about being at wit's end is that, no matter in which direction that one looks, the scenery is beautiful all around.

Beauty can be a deceptive thing, however. To move past the delay - any delay - is to encounter new obstacles. It's a lot like walking in quicksand. The only direction seems to be down, no matter how much that one struggles.

Even still, we have tread past the distance of eleven full issues, now. Surely, we have accomplished something!

Or do I only kid myself?

Make no mistake, writing is the easy

part. Layout design and compiling tend to be the true Titans of Terror. They are as cruel as they are demanding!

Vanity, vanity, all is vanity!

There's an eternity of truth in that statement. It has a certain elegance to it, an aura of beauty in its own right.

For, you see, no matter what I pursue, where this magazine is concerned, many are the creatures that lay in wait, preparing and perfecting their ambush.

Ah, but that is what makes it all such a glorious undertaking, to begin with!

*Hallelujah!*

Just one more issue, and then we head out beyond the perimeter of what was planned. For some reason, my mind darts back to when I was young, back to when I first watched *The Planet of the Apes*.

Beyond our next issue lurks the symbol, 13. What misfortune awaits us, as we approach that lore-steeped boundary?

What will we find there? Familiar territory and familiar ways? Or shall we be venturing into a place where we have no business being?

*The fires of change burn red hot! Our destiny lies further within the inferno.*



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# Why Do We Drop Out of Games?

## Tribal Starfleet Trade Report #5

Bernd Jaehnigen

The single greatest problem facing PBM/Turn-based Gaming today is the same thing it's been since Flying Buffalo started running games in 1970.

Dropouts.

I venture to say that a decent majority of you dear readers have dropped a game at some point in your PBM careers, and that every single one of you has been negatively impacted by other players dropping out.

To get a sense of why this is such a problem, imagine going out for your weekly bowling night with your buddies from work. One of the guys stumbles and gets a gutter ball his first time out, then fails to pick up a spare, knocking only 2 pins over. He watches the other first frame scores roll in — 9, a spare, and a lucky strike. Feeling like he has no chance to win, he mumbles "that's it for me boys, I'm outta here" on his way to the bar. Then halfway through the game a second bowler walks out the front door without a word. The two remaining bowlers look at their watches, making

mental calculations about whether there's any real contest at this point, whether they can get two of the bar flies to join a losing position just to finish the game, and whether it might be better to just shut the game down and see what new video games might be lurking in the arcade.

Such a scenario is unlikely, because bowling carries a small transaction cost. Once you're in the bowling alley and you've rented a lane, there's no reason to drop out — you just have fun bowling away. Even during a losing game, you feel like you're getting some good competitive practice. And it's fun to hang out with the guys regardless!

Now consider a scenario closer to home — the weekly boardgame night. Maybe it's Monopoly or Risk for the traditional family gamer, or maybe it's [Agricola](#) or [Puerto Rico](#) or [Twilight Imperium](#) for the advanced eurogamer. Everyone starts the evening fresh and enthusiastic, but as the game advances one player gradually loses interest. He's falling behind, he senses he doesn't have a chance at winning, the beer is getting to him, and there's a [new show](#) on SyFy he'd rather like to watch. So he gets up, says his goodbyes to a table full of confused looks, and everyone is left to assess whether it's worth finishing the game.



His position leaves a vacuum that alters the balance of the game. Maybe his assets will fall to his nearest neighbor, or the cards he was holding will now become available to the power player across the table. His departure might end up crowning an undeserving king. This has happened a few times at my friendly neighborhood game night — not often, but often enough that we tend to avoid lengthier games when certain players are present.

It's instructive to note that several of the games we play have been given the undesirable tag of "having a runaway leader problem." When one player attains an early advantage, he is able to leverage it into a commanding position strong enough to swat everyone else down. Such games are most-prone to early dropouts.

One would think that PBM games actually neuter some of these threats to sustained play. It's a game form that you can play at your own pace, you can take a nice long time to figure out your turn without annoying faster players, and

"transaction costs" are quite low — you never need to leave the comfort of your own boxer shorts.

So why do people drop out? Here is a note from S&D Reader Ry Schwark:

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*I think every game you play is a balance between the effort required and the reward you get.*

*Sometimes life crunches you, so the effort of filling out a turn sheet seems daunting, and you let the game go because you just can't keep up.*

*Other times events in the game (or life) suck some of the fun out of the game, so the 'reward' diminishes.*

*More simply, you drop when it's more work than fun. That calculus gets revisited every turn by every player to some degree. So as a consequence, a game that isn't designed with dropouts in mind, isn't going to fare well.*

*That's doubly true for GMing postal games. That is typically a LOT of work, and initial motivation can peter out quickly, and games fold a few to a dozen turns in...*

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This is sharply insightful commentary. The transaction cost of each new turn is NOT always low. It depends — maybe your position is growing to the point that you need a spreadsheet to track everything. Or maybe you're balancing diplomatic maneuvers and it's becoming difficult just getting the dwarves and the elves on the same battlefield at the same time. Or maybe the game has a core of

devoted players who seem to understand the implications of each rule far better than you do, and it's daunting to face them, knowing you can't possibly replicate their analytical prowess.

**What's ironic here is that for the most part, these "problems" are why we started playing these games in the first place!**

I started playing [Cluster Wars](#) not in spite of the fact that I'd be spreadsheeting through a complex simulation, but BECAUSE I would! I played [Alamaze](#) with a direct interest in trying a diplomatically complex game!

And yet I share many of Ry's reasons. Cluster Wars is an incredible experience, but I ended up dropping it because I had fallen behind several turns in a row. I do suffer from time management issues (*hello Charles!*), but I have seen well-organized and self-actualized players drop that game, as well. I had a habit of putting off my turn until the night before it was due, and then finding myself woefully short of time. So I'd submit a placeholder turn — just enough to keep my factories running, keep feeding my colonists, and maybe research better hyper engines. But I wouldn't optimize my production lines, scout surrounding star systems, or (most importantly) design the complex colony ships necessary to expand in that game.

I fell far behind the leaders of the pack. My little empire was starting to look like little more than a speed bump to some of these guys. So I joined a rudimentary alliance just to secure my local space. I would trade tech and info with the two power players of that group, and they'd leave me to turtle and observe. But even so, they'd be frustrated if I failed to develop my position properly — I became a vulnerable spot in their interstellar armor. They were facing another much more powerful alliance, and needed me to either toe the line or host their fleets in my own systems. This dynamic grew only starker each time I submitted a placeholder turn, and the thought of breaking that cycle and doing a proper analysis for an optimal set of orders became daunting.

**I've heard of other players committing as much as an hour a day to keep up in that game. As soon as a new turn comes out, the alliance emails start flying.**

This is what I used to do back in my college days (when time was abundant), and this is actually what I aspire to play again now! Even though I dropped out of Cluster Wars, I am keeping tabs on the game, and fervently hope that the moderator will start up a new run. If he does, I will sign up. This next time, I'll aspire to keep up EVERY TURN, and take advantage of all the spreadsheet player

aids others have come up with to make the game smoother.

It's understandable to drop a losing position. It's less understandable to drop a sustainable position that is just confusing. Some games have complex dynamics between rules, or boast a rich set of hidden rules/content, or host diverse and energetic player communities with deep histories.

It can be more than a little intimidating to push your way into such an environment, because any decision you make can (and likely will) undermine your long-term interests. The very depth of play and engaging game proposition can sometimes stonewall prospective players, even after they've made the commitment to sign up. It's definitely a bit of a paradox, and is doubtless the source of no small amount of frustration among commercial moderators.

There is plenty that the moderators can do to make PBM games more accessible — much has been written on that rich subject here in S&D. They can host games for beginners, they can match newbies up with veterans for a game or

two, they can post tutorials and FAQs, etc. They can also set up incentives to ward against dropouts. I've known games to charge a deposit fee, repayable at the end of the game. And some moderators cultivate their base by providing leaderboards, sharing recognition for new players, and encouraging community involvement.

But the focus of this article is on the players. What can you do to avoid dropping out?

First and foremost, you need to remember why you're playing these games in the first place. PBM games offer a chance to get more out of a game experience than just about anything else out there.

You aren't being forced to recalculate the supply chain for your barbarian horse army, you *GET TO* experience the awe of assembling a mighty cavalry to trample your enemies into dust. You *GET TO* collaborate with your teammates to stab the Rigellian Alliance in the back two turns hence. And yes, you *GET TO* see your articles printed up in S&D for all PBM posterity to see. (*Hi Charles!*)

Time management is certainly important. Try to draft your turn, your diplomatic entreaties, and your newsletter articles WELL BEFORE they are due. Stuff



happens, people need to respond, and you need to be ready to react, even between turn cycles.

It is also imperative (for both players and moderators) that a strong sense of narrative imbue every position and every turn result.

We're not playing chess, here. (Not that there's anything wrong with that, and I will gladly play chess by mail with anyone reading this article.) When you communicate with opponents, ham it up. Act the part. You can and will inspire them to do likewise. While I dearly loved the [cheesy bravado](#) Charles and I engaged in during our Far Horizons escapades, I was especially thrilled with other players started joining in the fun. ["The Mold"](#) — if you are reading this, I'm looking at you.

I recently read about a solitaire board game simulating sub warfare during WWII ([Silent War](#)). The full campaign can take over a hundred hours to complete. Most people would be turned off by this as an exercise in repetitive die rolling and supply management, but there is a core of die-hards that just loves this game, in no small part because it maintains a strong narrative storyline throughout. There are names of ships, locations, individual captains, and special

events throughout. You FEEL like you are the admiral of the entire sub fleet.

Another way to redouble your enjoyment is to share your game in some way.

Post about it on the forum, write up a memoir each turn to be published in an after-action report, or just engage in some smack talk with the other players. I discuss this in more detail elsewhere in this issue, so be sure to give that a look.

Ultimately, I think we as the PBM community ought to ju-jitsu this dropout paradox. Instead of approaching these games as great experiences if you can just get past the dropouts and minimalist players, try thinking of them as direct challenges. "If I can sustain this position through the next three battle rounds, I can sit at the tribal council as one of the elder tribes! If I can spend a couple of hours this week designing that stealth destroyer, I can force the Rigellians back to their home system before they find my asteroid base!

And yes, if I can manage to complete a fully functional magazine layout and leverage some great tools to make publication easier, then I can look forward to a lifetime of awesome PBM magazines! (*Why hello there, Charles!*)

**\* Editor's Note:** *Bernd Jaehnigen is the Associate Editor of Suspense & Decision magazine. He continues to fear Darkseid!*

# PBM HIVEMIND

## Where PBM Players Gather

PBM Forums	PBM on Yahoo! Discussion Groups	PBM on Google+ Discussion Groups	PBM on Facebook	PBM on Facebook Discussion Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Agesa Publications</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Alamaze</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Briny en Garde!</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Cruenti Dei</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Duel2</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Empires at War 1805</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fallen Empires</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fall of Rome</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fantasya</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Far Horizons</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Flying Buffalo Gamer</a></li><li>• <a href="#">KJC Games</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Lords of Conquest</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Madhouse UK</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Middle-earth PBM</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Midgard</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Midnight/MU</a></li><li>• <a href="#">PBeM-Spiele</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Phoenix: BSE</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Rimworlds</a></li><li>• <a href="#">The Road of Kings]</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Rolling Thunder Games, Inc.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Takamo Universe</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">AtlantisDev</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Cluster Wars</a></li><li>• <a href="#">DungeonWorld</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Forgotten Realms</a></li><li>• <a href="#">London EnGarde</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Legends PBM</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Midgard</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Olympia</a></li><li>• <a href="#">The Tribes of Crane</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Galac-Tac</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Alamaze</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Clash of Legends</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Diplomacy on USAK</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Duel2</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Empires at War 1805</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fallen Empires PBE</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Flying Buffalo, Inc.</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Forgotten Realms</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Galactic Prisoners</a></li><li>• <a href="#">It's A Crime</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Rimworlds</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Rolling Thunder Games</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Starweb</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Takamo Universe</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Duel2</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fallen Empires Chat Room</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Fall of Rome</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Hyborian War</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Lands of Nevron</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Legends</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Middle-Earth PBM</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Phoenix: BSE</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Play by Mail Games</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Science Fiction Writers and Artists Group for Takamo Universe</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Star Fleet Warlord</a></li></ul>

**Play By Mail** - *In pursuit of imagination-based gaming!*

# Where We're Heading...

Houston, we are at T plus eleven. Do you copy? Approaching rendezvous. Over.

Our rendezvous is with destiny - *the one that I set for us, long ago*. We are on the verge of our twelve issue destination, even if we did manage to get lost in space along the way.

Directly ahead? Issue number twelve.

Everything along the way to this point in time considered, including both the good and the bad of how and when we got here to where we are now, I like to think that it has been a worthwhile learning experience - and an ongoing one, at that.

We've lost a few people along the way, and we've also managed to pick up a few, as well.

Nonetheless, our journey continues. We reflect upon the past, but we march firmly into the

future.

Along the way, we even managed to conquer and overcome a year-long hiatus from publication. Sure, it sucks that our ink dried up for a bit, but it is a cause for celebration to make the comeback. If we count our failures, as we should, shouldn't we also be at least as willing to count our accomplishments?

*Suspense & Decision* started its existence as a PBM magazine for the 21st Century. It remains that, even today, all these months and a couple of years later.

Publishing this magazine exacts a toll from my clock. It intrudes into my life, out in the 'real world.' But, Hell, so do a whole host of other things.

Getting this far has not transpired without encountering a lot of

distractions along the way. Some suggestions have been implemented. Others have not.

Meeting a monthly publication deadline isn't always easy. All too often, in fact, I fail to reach the mark in the designated time. But, aside from the attempted hand-off that dropped us squarely into the Twilight Zone, for the most part, I think that we have done OK.

Missing deadlines is easy to do. Too easy, in fact! It is ever something to be guarded against, just because it is so easy to do, and because there's always a number of good, sound reasons as to why we should wait just a little bit longer to publish the issue at hand.

Decision is half of our magazine's moniker. It's not always the fun half. Usually it's not, in fact.



But, there comes a time when a decision has to be rendered, so that we keep moving this digital game train forward.

This column is typically written late in the compiling process. I write it off the top of my head, with whatever thoughts just come to mind and start pouring out. If it doesn't always make a lot of sense, then that may just have something to do with it.

Bear with me, if you will, though - or just skip past it, if your preference in reading material lies elsewhere.

If you knew just how very late in the month that I began to compile this particular issue, you might still be wondering how I managed to get it done, at all.

But, we tried to do a few things differently, this time around. Not everything that you try pans out, though. That we fail at times, does not preclude us from trying new things, again, in the future. But, to keep moving forward requires

that we do just, exactly that - *Keep moving forward!*

While we miss deadlines, our readers wait, and while it is always good to have people wait for the next issue in anticipation, it is never good to have people wait, due to us missing our own deadlines which we, ourselves, establish.

It could be worse, I suppose. *Suspense & Decision* could be a bi-monthly publication. For that matter, it could be a quarterly.

But, it's not!

Pushing deadlines further out is always a temptation unto itself. Hell, if my first-hand experience to date is any indication, at all, that temptation is always close at hand.

Even worse, there are those amongst our readership who, from time to time, advocate that we transition away from a monthly publication schedule. *Flagship* magazine allotted itself more time

to publish each issue. Yet, it endured its fair share of delays in getting various issues published, to be certain.

I have, in fact, even considered publishing without a deadline, at all. Then, each succeeding issue would get published, just whenever it is ready.

My inclination, my gut instinct, if you will, is to publish more frequently, not less frequently, if it is anything, at all.

I do appreciate the thoughtfulness. I appreciate the consideration.

But, honestly, I don't want the wheels to turn slower. Indeed, I want to shovel coal into the firebox, and steam onward full steam ahead!

The race is not always to the swift. But, usually, it is. Let's be honest about that.

Thus, I am disinclined to just sit here with my wheels spinning. I would likely go slap, raving crazy, were I to try and shift gears down and go

to a less-frequent rate of publication.

That's just not where my heart lies, you see. To thine own heart be true comes to mind. It is as fitting a philosophy for this magazine to be guided by as any, I reckon.

Now, some of you out there may just possess the foresight or the experience to see where this approach may lead.

Even if this chosen approach runs the risk of the magazine ending up a train wreck, I would remind you that even trains have schedules to which they must adhere.

Danger inheres in all that

we do, in all that we undertake, the danger of failure if no other.

Each issue, we make our stops. To a large degree, our itinerary is a trek across familiar territory.

Heading forward, we're going to have to lay more track. We're going to have to grow the infrastructure of those games that we explore.

Far from a civilizing force, we're a great iron beast. We huff. We puff. We chug along.

The drudgery associated with the task will never subside. But, with it comes the rather golden opportunity to build one heck of a literary

railroad, one that seeks to serve populations of gamers to whom the major gaming magazines tend to show fleeting, if any, interest in.

With the hiatus in our pocket, we're a long way behind schedule. Laying track less frequently won't help us to close that gap.

Every issue, I cause myself confusion and delay. In that sense, I'm not a very useful engine.

But, when the great iron beast comes pulling into the station each issue, it's a great feeling to see more passengers come aboard. The hectic pace contributes to the scenery of the ride.



# Suspense & Decision

