

# Suspense & Decision

2017

ISSUE

16

March



***A PBM Magazine for the 21st Century!***

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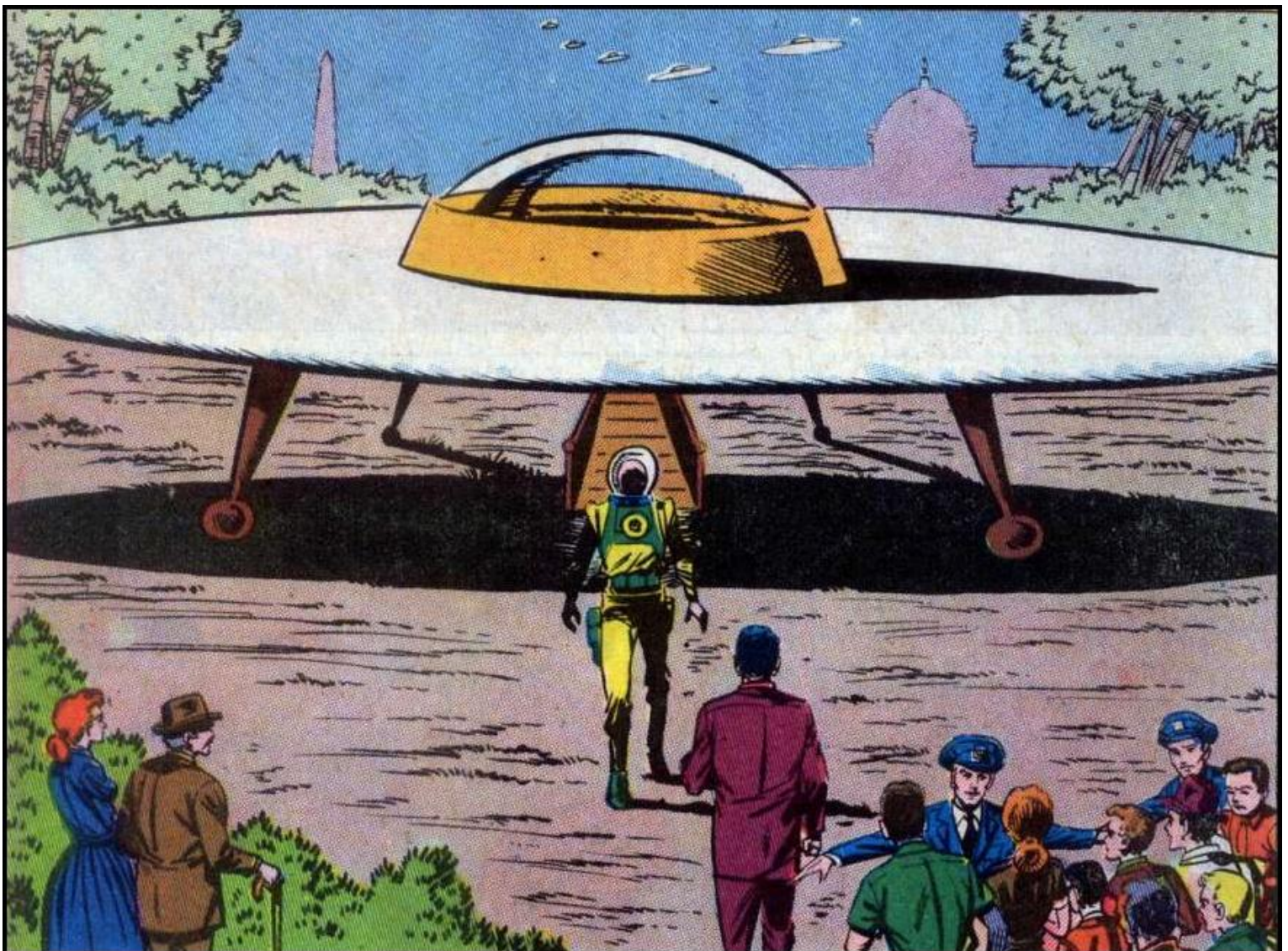
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**Issue #16 - March 2017**

## **Welcome to Issue #16!**

*What a difference a month makes! The temptation to bring this little adventure in PBM publishing to a close is always out there. It's very real, and it's very...tempting! Plus, that temptation takes many forms, it dons many personalities, and it speaks to me in voices all too familiar.*

*All the more reason, then, to celebrate yet another issue of Suspense & Decision! All the more reason, then, to renew my resolve and to steel my will against such temptations.*

*This month's front cover is a parody. Being a Monty Python fan, the quest for the Holy Grail is never far from my mind. Thus, I ask you, our beloved and opinionated readership, what is the Holy Grail of Play-By-Mail?*

*Is it the perfect game? Is it the best game? Is there anything out there, right now, that fits that bill within the realms of PBM and its digital progeny? Or are we ever doomed to play the gaming equivalent of shrubbery?*

*Hardcore PBM players remind me of the Knights who say Ni. The postal genre of gaming is sometimes snickered at. Indeed, the very fact that people play games via the postal service, at all, strikes some as a comedy in miniature, it seems. Nonetheless, these ardent souls continue to fight the proverbial good fight, remaining loyal to a form of gaming that is viewed as archaic or obsolete by many practitioners of gaming forms of a more recent origin.*

*And so it is that Suspense & Decision proudly hails itself as a PBM magazine for the 21st Century! Who knows? Maybe this publication has already become a technological Neanderthal, in its own right. Regardless, we continue on our march. We've already come a long way, but the real journey still lies way out ahead of us. Over the horizon is where our destiny lies!*

*One thing is certain, and that is that technology, alone, does not the Holy Grail of Gaming make. Perhaps there is no Holy Grail. Perhaps the search has been in vain. Perhaps the Holy Grail is not a game, but an experience. Regardless, I present to you this - our next issue. Ni!*

**Charles Mosteller - Editor of Suspense & Decision magazine**



# Clash of Legends



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**Greek Battles**  
4-Player and 8-Player Scenarios



# Kings of Steel

## Blast from the Past

Colin Danks

Kings of Steel was a fantasy wargame first run by "Sloth Enterprises" and then run by Stephen White during 1990's. The game had a fixed 12 turns which lasted a real year. 14 players took control of various nations striving to take control of the map.

The map consisted of the continent of Arcana and was run as an outlying province of the main "Blackstar Empire". Due to some outside influence the empire was dying, leaving what forces left on the continent to deal with the locals! Most of these forces were called "Blackstar Legions" with the last remaining governor being help up in the capitol city at the centre of the map.

The locals being what remained of various factions remaining on the outskirts of the map. These are what each player controlled and had various different powers.

A Player Nation Sheet was given to you at the start of each game listing what your forces were along with your victory conditions. The 14 nations were:

1. Woodland Alliance: Mix of Human, Elf, Halfling and Centaur alliance.
2. The Plainsmen: Nation of Men
3. The Warlock: Evil Wizard
4. The Coven: Human nation with powers over the Undead
5. The Hillmen: Dark Human Nation
6. The Attu: God-like beings
7. The Klasshii: Reptile Nation
8. The Druids: Mystical Human Nation
9. The Loyalists: Rightful rulers of the continent.
10. The Elves: Opponents of the Darkstar
11. The Dwarves: Opponents of the Darkstar
12. The Darkclaw Orcs
13. The Sect: Religious Cult
14. The Kir: Human Nation



You started with a number of units (Light and Heavy Infantry, Cavalry, Generals and monsters/specials) which you had to create up to four armies with. You were also given a reinforcement schedule, which on the given turn, would add these units to one of your armies.



You also had hidden victory conditions, which were added at the end of the game to your main running points which all nations could see every turn.

It was an interesting mix as to what each position had to allocate for their armies. The Plainsmen had a high number of Cavalry. The Warlock had Battle Sorcerers, The Woodland Alliance had Ents etc.

The map consisted of the 14 player nations at the edges. The remaining areas were neutral to all until a player army travelled through

it. Some area's had Forts or Cities, but it was the points associated with each which was the main focus of the game.

Each area had 2 values. The first being the amount of victory points, which at the end of the turn was counted towards the nation's total victory points.

The second was the amount of diplomacy points associated with that area. This is where the game got interesting. At the beginning of each turn you had to use these diplomacy points to bid to control various neutral single point positions. These were scattered around the map and consisted of 16 Blackstar Legions, 3 Barbarian Hordes, The Assassin Guild, Trolls, Dwarves, The Hydra, Wyrms, The Hexmaster, The Knights and the School of Alchemy. Once you managed to

**"As this was a hand moderated game it was in the very much story telling of each turn which gave the game its unique flavour."**

control one of these units you could move them, or help in the attack of some-where. However problem with these units was that you had to bid every turn. If you were outbid the following turn the unit could turn against you ! They were therefore a two edge sword and you had to be careful how you used them.

Most of these neutrals were armies (The Legions), others were single entities (The Hydra) or were located in certain places (The School of Alchemy). The armies you could use, the monster also, the other positions gave you "Power Cards".

Again another feature of the game were these Power Cards. You started with 4 and could only gain more by either occupying one of the fortress or cities on the map, or by having an alliance with one of the groups who would issue you with a power card every turn.

These power cards could only be used once in the game, so the trick would be how to use them. Should you use them early on in the game, or wait until the last moment.

Each power cards (and there was at least 40 in total) had one effect. They could add units to your army, be worth VP or DP points or could be used to aid your army in movement. A game has been won or lost by the use of one of these

cards !

again.....

As this was a hand moderated game it was in the very much story telling of each turn which gave the game its unique flavour. The GM would send out 3 separate turnsheets to you every turn. The first is the one you filled in with your army movements etc (you could also write a small paragraph on how your army would act during a battle). The second was your main player turn sheet and what happened during your turn. This was normally 1 page. The last was the turn report.

The turn report listed all nations and their victory points. It also listed the major neutral locations. The remaining was a rundown of each player position in a story telling narrative. Depending on how many battles had occurred on that turn, this could be between 2 and 4 pages long.

I have included a map of the world. The Player Sheet which you are given on your set-up. The player turnsheet, player turn report and then the general report for 1 turn. I hope in this way you can see the flavour of the game.

I only managed to collect 6 of the 14 player nation set up sheets. I would of liked to of seen the others but I guess they will be lost to time now. It was one of the games which would not be able to be run now due to the time involved by the GM and amount of players it would need for such a short time. Maybe one day when I win the lottery I'd be in a position for some-one to start this up

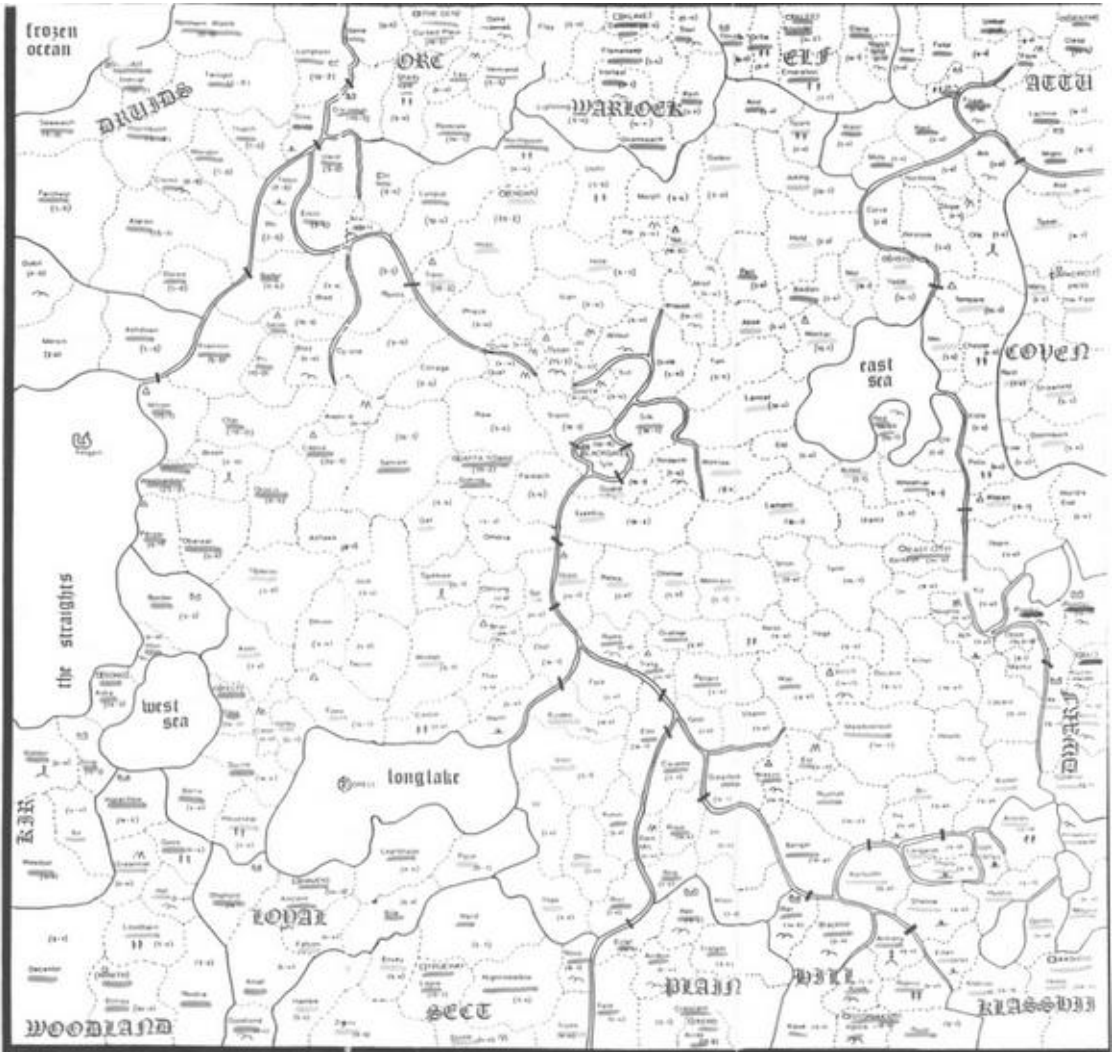




# Kings of Steel

63

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| <u>DRUIDS</u>  | <u>KLASSHII</u>  |
| <u>ORCS</u>    | <u>HILLMEN</u>   |
| <u>WARLOCK</u> | <u>PLAINSMEN</u> |
| <u>ELVES</u>   | <u>SECT</u>      |
| <u>ATTU</u>    | <u>LOYALISTS</u> |
| <u>COVEN</u>   | <u>WOODLAND</u>  |
| <u>DWARVES</u> | <u>KIR</u>       |





VERY IMPORTANT - DO NOT MISLAY THIS SHEET

KINGS OF STEEL GAME 63

PLAYER NATION DATA-SHEET

NATION:DRUID

NOTES :Human Race in the North West of Arcana

FORCES: You have the following troops to allocate between your THREE armies. You should also allocate your generals and any monsters listed to whichever armies you wish bearing in mind that once allocated,units and generals cannot be moved between armies for any reason.

REMEMBER that a \*\*\*\* general can command a maximum of 20 army points and a \*\*\* general can control only 10 army points at the most.Each army,once detailed, must be started in one of your home areas - ONE of them must start at your Capital and no more than one can start in each area.

<u>ARMY POINTS</u>	<u>GENERALS</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>(SV-TV)</u>	<u>MONSTERS</u>
HI : 18	Bengar Wod	**** (1)	(4-4)	2 ENTS
	Gurthsmile	**** (2)	(3-2)	3 GREAT EAGLES
LI : 11	Cragerak	*** (1)	(2-2)	
	Dunstable Ord	** (1)	(0-4)	
C : 6	Riverwhile	** (2)	(0-1)	
	Flord Racker	* (1)	(0-2)	
	Gettingwood	* (2)	(0-2)	
	Hardhollow	* (3)	(0-3)	

You have not got command of a Navy....

REINFORCEMENTS: These troops should be allocated at the BEGINNING of any turn on which they become due to an army of your choice which is in supply-so long as this does not overtax the commanding general's ability to command the army. Any reinforcements not placed in armies on the correct turns(by noting that they have been so allocated on the appropriate area of the turnsheet-the first column listing how many troops are to be allocated on each flank)WILL BE LOST.

SCHEDULE:	TURN	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Heavy Infantry:	-	-	1	3	2	2	-	-	-
Light Infantry:	-	1	2	3	2	3	-	-	-
Cavalry:	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-

SPECIAL VICTORY CONDITIONS: (Bonus to final turn victory points - should be claimed on turn 12 along with the return of this sheet)

- Control any THREE Cities(Not Nation Capitals) - See Gazette)..... 35 Points
- Ensure that NO-ONE(including yourself) occupies Blackgate on  
turn 12..... 40 Points
- Control of each Wooded or Wooded Hill area outside Homeland..... 5 Points
- For Possession of the Wand of Lightning..... 30 Points
- For each unused Powercard returned at game end..... 2-5 Points

**Submission Deadline for Next Issue**

**of Suspense & Decision magazine is**

**March 20th, 2017**



### TROLLS OF THE DARK MOUNTAINS

---

Rasp continues to favour the Plainsmen. Utilising the "Ford" which has been so generously provided, he crosses the river to rendezvous with the First Army in Greatfork. With no opposition being discovered, the Trolls retreat back over the Ford (which is now a permanent fixture) and resume their former position in Cavenix.

### VII LEGION

---

Corini marches his Legionaries west in order to secure Orpo Fortress. No problems are encountered.

### IV LEGION

---

Alexander marches his Legion into Barkesh and deploys for battle close to the city walls...

### ASSASSIN'S GUILD

---

The Guild provide you with a Special Envoy.

### 1ST ARMY

---

Kevlar crosses the bridge to Greatfork where he joined by the Dark Mountain Trolls. There is evidence of recent occupation by the XIII Legion which has gone east.

### 2ND ARMY

---

Grinbad Khan holds his position in Crescent. No threat to the Plainsmen Homeland comes this month.

### 3RD ARMY

---

Klaviran force-marches his army through Esentin and into Obeline. No problems are encountered during the journey which costs him 200 Foot.

### 4TH ARMY

---

Yardherk decides to stay inside East City as a large Hillmen Army arrives from Tene. The Enemy outnumber the IV Legion which has deployed outside the walls but still close to the city. The Hillmen strike swiftly, advancing quickly on all fronts with infantry. Several phalanxes of heavy infantry push forward while lighter troops provide some cover with missile weapons. The Hillmen concentrate on the Legionaries, virtually ignoring the stream of arrows from atop the city walls. Scores of arrows fall on the Blackstar Lines, reaping a sizeable crop of lives. Mounted Hillmen attack the Legion's Right Flank which is furthest away from East City. They outnumber the Blackstar Horse by more than two to one and inflict terrible losses upon the IV Legion during a long and hard-fought engagement. The Hillmen employ a strange staff which sends all the arrows targeted against them back through an arc to strike their source of origin. This includes a couple of volleys from the Plainsmen Archers too. For the Legionaries, hundreds die as their own arrows take their lives, creating much confusion. The Allied Bowmen soon realise the nature of the Staff's powers and abandon their missile fire. The Hillmen Archers find that their own arrows are unaffected.

The Sceptre of Might is employed by Yardherk and several units of Hillmen Foot drop to the ground as if struck by a huge blow. They do not rise again. Retaliation from the Hillmen is rapid. A Sorcerer priest sends a blast of spellfire hurtling up towards the General. The magical force rips chunks of masonry from the battle ments, killing and maiming Plains troops in the immediate area. Yardherk is injured in the blast but not fatally. However, he refrains from using the Sceptre again when his physicker confines him to bed. But for the Heal spell, the Plainsmen Leader would have been killed.

Alexander is not having a good day. The arrowstorm has decimated his ranks several times over and his situation looks bleak as the remnants of his cavalry are being dealt with by the mounted Hillmen who outnumber them. The Blackstar Foot are slowly losing ground as the Hillmen utilise their numerical advantage.

The Centre is undermined by a deadly combination of heavy infantry, a Troll and the powers of the Sorcerer Priest. Suddenly, the position collapses and is overwhelmed. Moments later, the Blackstar Right crumbles as the victorious Hillmen Cavalry smash the position. Alexander sees nothing of this for he is slain when the Blackstar Centre dies.

The Legionaries in the remaining position (the intact Left) break and flee. They do not get far before they are chased down by pursuing cavalry. A few try to seek refuge in the city but the gates remain shut for Yardherk cannot risk allowing the Hillmen to get troops inside the walls. The Enemy make camp and initiate a siege. Their losses are in the region of 200 Horse and 1000 Foot. The Fourth Army has been reduced by 200 Foot.

The Rulers of East City provide you with a Catapult.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In Issue #77 of Flagship magazine, there is an article titled: Kings of Steel: Old Kid on the Block, which is a review of the game Kings of Steel by Martin Lewis, according to an entry made in the [PBM Wiki](#) for Flagship magazine's back issues.





## VICTORY POINTS

## NEUTRAL POSITIONS

DRUIDS	246	LEGION I	- USTFIL	BLACK WYRM	- NIL
COVEN	211	II	- **DESTROYED!**	HYDRA	- TRENT
SECT	207	III	- EPEX	LOST DWARVES	- PROVOK
PLAINSMEN	172			TROLLS	- GREATFORK
ATTU	160				
KLASSHII	95	VI	- EAST CITY		
HILLMEN	85	VII	- ORPO	BLACKBREATH	- BORDER
ORCS	74	VIII	- BHAR	KNIGHTS	- DOKING
LOYALISTS	71	IX	- DEVON		
WARLOCK	64	X	- MORPH		
ELVES	14				
DWARVES	10				
WOODLAND	7	XIII	- **DESTROYED!**		
KIR	0				
AVERAGE	101.4				

EVENTS OF NOTE

After eight months of war it is the Druids who still lead the race for dominion over all Arcana. It is a month in which a number of important battles occur and two of these see Blackstar Legions paying the ultimate price...

The Arch-Druid secures Axon in the South but pulls one of his armies out of Orpo rather than see it become engaged with the VII Legion. Blackbreath pushes southward into the Won Hills but is forced into making a swift withdrawal in order to avoid becoming involved in a major conflict which occurs inside this region.

The Orcs pull their armies homeward, concerned with the possibility of a Druid Invasion of their Homeland. Meanwhile, a Warlock Army maintains its grip on the Darkclaw Lands by remaining in Dake. Meanwhile, the Hydra enters Trent.

The Black Wurm of Felgarl flies to Nil Fortress with orders to attack the X Legion. However, the enraged wurm finds that Gladius has already moved on and the cheated dragon roosts in Nil Pass while awaiting new instructions.

The Attu continue to dominate the Elven Territories. This month it is the turn of Thrush Castle and the forested expanse of Orlia to fall beneath the Attu Heel. Further south, a tired and hungry army of Elves is faced with a larger Coven Army in Huld. The Elven Leader mobilises his units but their deployment is slow and below standard. The Coven take advantage of the situation and initiate an attack before the Elves are ready. A pair of Battle Sorcerors bombard the Elves with spellfire while Coven Bowmen provide some supportive shooting for their advancing comrades. Meanwhile, Coven Horse streak in to attack the vulnerable Elven Flanks; unscreened by cavalry. Elven Archers loose a couple of volleys at the charging Horsemen and manage to inflict some losses before they ride full-tilt into the Elven Lines. The weakened flanks buckle and collapse as the Horsemen cut down scores of Elves where they stand. The disruption spreads inward to de-stabilise the Elven centre which is already struggling against a strong core of Coven Foot which is driving deep into the position. Fatigue sets in quickly for the starving Elves and their resistance ends abruptly as their Commander is blown apart by spellfire. What follows is a massacre as the helpless Elves are butchered on the spot. They are wiped out. Elsewhere, a Coven Army force-marches to annex Tene.

The Klasshii spend the month quietly but they still surround the Dwarven Capital and prevent vital commodities from entering the besieged city. Rumour has it that the Dwarves are already sustaining losses as their predicament worsens with each passing day.

A Hillmen Army comes to grief in Barkesh. Its Commander is unaware that the supplies which arrive unexpectedly have been poisoned by his Enemies. His ranks are decimated by the toxin and the majority of those who survive are left suffering with dysentery. Amidst all this confusion, an Assassin strikes and the Hillmen Commander is slain. His murderer is killed while trying to escape but this provides little in the way of consolation. A sub-ordinate General tries to assume control but is unable to extend his influence far enough through the ranks to restore order. It is at this point that the VI Legion arrives from the West and that the Plainsmen choose to sally from within East City.

The Plainsmen possess a powerful artifact which is wielded to good effect. Several Hillmen units are crushed into the ground by the forces commanded by the "Sceptre of Might" and the shocked Hillmen look to their Commander for inspiration. A central core of infantry, bolstered by a Troll and the presence of a Sorcerer Priest, stand firm as the Allies converge on their position. Arrows stream towards the Plains units but are turned back against their point of origin as the Plainsmen activate the "Staff of Kharkbhar". In addition, the magical projectiles of a summoned catapult are also reversed. They devastate a wide area and vapourise scores of the Allied Task-Force in the vicinity of the etherial engine which winks out of existence. The sight inspires the flagging Hillmen who launch a counter-attack. Alius is driven back and is soon in serious trouble as mounted Hillmen charge into his Left Flank, slicing through his own riders and into the bewildered Legionaries beyond. The position collapses and the Blackstar Centre is soon under threat as the Hillmen Cavalry continue their momentum. Meanwhile, the Sceptre continues to smite Hillmen Foot to the ground.

The Plainsmen anchor with a summoned Troll while their Horsemen find their way clear to assault a mass of dis-organised Hillmen who have yet to react to their new Leader's influence. They offer only a token resistance before most of them break and run. The Plains Cavalry run a gauntlet of missile spells from the Sorcerer Priest while his images of terror cause a number of mounts to scare and ditch their riders. However, the majority win through to roll over the Hillmen units. The Sorcerer priest is trampled amidst the fighting and the Plains Troll meets his match as he squares off against the Hillmen Trollish Champion. The victor dies from his wounds moments after defeating his opponent.

Suddenly, the Hillmen General is killed and his vital input is lost. Leaderless and without hope, the Hillmen battle on until none survive. The Plainsmen recover the Staff of Kharkbhar from amongst the slain only to have the Sceptre stolen from under their noses later in the month!

The Plainsmen march into Arezzo and engage the XIII Legion outside the fortress. They hold firm as the Blackstar units close. The XIII Cavalry moves forward to threaten the Plains Flanks but are easily countered by the more numerous Plains Foot. Meanwhile, the control for the centre of the field is waged between the two infantry factions. Bigus Dikus has fewer troops under his command and finds himself with fewer still as a Battle Sorcerer hurls a tremendous blast of spellfire at the Legion. He follows it up with a series of smaller bursts which wreak carnage amongst the panicking and demoralised Legionaries. As Plains Foot surge forward to take advantage of the situation, the survivors bolt and run...

The confusion in the Blackstar Centre spreads to the adjacent flanks with Bigus Dikus failing to restore order amidst the chaos. The Plainsmen expend little effort as they rout the XIII Legion. Most of the shaken legionaries are cut down where they stand as their positions are overwhelmed. Only a few Horsemen manage to break away and escape. The XIII Legion, along with its Commander, is wiped out.

The Sect link with the VIII Legion in Sol where Bellar places his own mounted troops along the flanks of the Sectian Army to screen them from Enemy Cavalry. Advancing deeper into the province, they encounter the II Legion.

Archers raise their bows and arrows fly towards their targets. Men perish on both sides during the arrowstorm as the distance narrows between the two forces. The II Legion is without cavalry and Bellar orders his own Horsemen to swing around behind the Enemy and cut them off from any possible line of retreat. Allied Infantry close for melee and the II Legion is hard pressed to hold formation under the sudden onslaught. They fight with desperation, cursing their Commander who has led them to this, as they strive for survival. Gradually, the II Legion succumbs to the superior numbers and a final charge into the rear of the army by the VIII Cavalry de-stabilises the Legion which collapses and then is annihilated.



A Section Army marches into Winfall but finds its supply lines disrupted and has to seek an alternative route for incoming Baggage Trains. However, another Section Army in Upaxon is not so fortunate, and ends the month in isolation courtesy of the Druids.

Two Loyalist Armies march into the Won Hills where they encounter the last remnants of the Kir War Machine. The Kir have deployed themselves on the slopes of a small knoll with their archers inside a steel perimeter of heavy infantry. The Loyalists surround the hill in a slow but deliberate pincer movement while the two Commanders consider their options. Steep slopes prohibit the use of cavalry and so the Loyalist Infantry masses for an assault from several directions. Battle commences with the Loyalists utilising the "Wand of Lightning" itself. Crackling bolts of energy smite the Kir Lines, causing chaos and confusion amidst the sudden carnage. The Loyalist soldiers begin their advance, hoping to take advantage before the Kir can recover.

Loyalist Bowmen sends showers of arrows raining down on the already decimated Kir. More fall but return fire starts as a trickle before turning into a raging torrent as the Kir Archers recover their composure and send feathered death winging through the air against the Loyalists whose pace slows as they begin their ascent.

Melee commences and looks to be going in the Kir's favour in the first minutes as the Loyalists find that fighting uphill is not easy and swordarms tire more quickly and balance becomes crucial. Nevertheless, superior numbers ensure that progress is made and the Kir are pushed backward and uphill as their numbers decrease with attrition. As the circle of Defenders contracts so too does the number of attackers who can get close to find an opening. Suddenly, a row of Kir Foot slip apart and a Hornbeast rushes forward. Scores are trampled before the startled Loyalists can react. The armoured reptile continues downhill, cutting a bloody path through their ranks with its gaze firmly fixed on the Standard of one of the Loyalist Armies and its Commander. A Gargoyle is summoned which swoops down to attack the Hornbeast. His bat-wings propel him swiftly and he is able to dart in and dodge the monster's horns. A wicked-looking curved blade soon has the reptile seriously wounded. Loyalist Foot close in and the monster is eventually subdued.

Atop the knoll, the situation goes from bad to worse for the Kir. Superior numbers, which are steadily reinforced, press in from all sides and it is fatigue which eventually causes a few openings in the Kir perimeter to be made. These few chinks in the Kir Armour are quickly exploited and the position folds. The remainder of the army is massacred on the spot.... which brings another month to a close.



# KINGS OF STEEL

PLAYER'S NAME: A.N. OTHER      CREDIT: £ 7.50      GAME: 66  
 NATION: KIR      TURN: 3      DUE DATE: 21 OCT 97

ARMY 1	COMMANDING GENERAL: <b>MARTELLUS</b> *** (3-2)	Generals	Monsters	Area
	Points			
	L    C    R    RE			
START	HI 10, 4, 3, 3			OBEREAL
	LI 4, 1, 2, 1	HIMERIUS ** (0-2)	GIANT C	↓ (FORCE MARCH)
END	C 3, 1, 0, 1		Position ↑	OROCIS
	HI			↓
	LI	(POSITION) ↑		CAPUA
	C			

ARMY 2	COMMANDING GENERAL: <b>REMUS</b> *** (3-1)	Generals	Monsters	Area
	Points			
	L    C    R    RE			
START	HI 8, 4, 4			BORDER
	LI 5, 3, 2	KRONUS ** (0-4)	DRAGON C	↓
END	C 2, 1, 1			UPAXON
	HI			
	LI			
	C			

ARMY 3	COMMANDING GENERAL: <b>CRAXOS</b> *** (2-3)	Generals	Monsters	Area
	Points			
	L    C    R    RE			
START	HI 3, 1, 1, 1			STRIP (VIA FLEET)
	LI 2, 2			↓
END	C 1, 1			ASHDOWN
	HI			
	LI			
	C			

ARMY 4	COMMANDING GENERAL: <b>VALERIAN</b> *** (2-1)	Generals	Monsters	Area
	Points			
	L    C    R    RE			
START	HI 2, 1, 1			ELGA (SUPPORT LEGION III)
	LI 2, 1, 1			↓
END	C 1, 1			AXON
	HI			
	LI			
	C			

NAVY	COMMANDING ADMIRAL: <b>MALODOROUS</b> *** (4)	Admirals	Monsters	Area
	Ships			
START	WG : 7			STRAIGHTS
	BG : 7			↓ TRANSPORT ARMY 3
END	WG : 7			ASHDOWN
	BG : (SUFFICIENT TO TRANSPORT ARMY 3)			

DIPLOMACY POINT ALLOCATION:				DP's Available: 7
Neutral	Points allocated:	Start Area	End Area	
SCHOOL OF ALCHEMY	4 * 2 = 8			
	<i>← DOUBLED BECAUSE KIR CONTROL ELGA (HELP).</i>			
LEGION III	3	EPEX	AXON	

USE REVERSE OF SHEET, IF REQUIRED, FOR FURTHER AND CONDITIONAL ORDERS.



# URBAN OPERATIONS



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# Play by Mail

## A little known pastime

Paul Mouchet

While I've been working on [Cohorts](#), over the past year or so, I've had an opportunity to tell people about the game. Mostly, they've been the mildly curious who ask, "What do you do for a living?" My response is typically something like, "After 35 years of IT consulting, I've decided to go back to game development full time." At this point, the conversation typically takes one of several paths. There are those who look at me like I'm nuts because I'm walking away from a lucrative career architecting systems for other people. There are some who look at me like I'm nuts because they think after 35 years of consulting it's time for me to retire.

Then there are those who want to know what type of game I'm making. It's these people that, for me, spark the more interesting conversation.

These conversations tend to follow similar paths as well: "Well", I'll say "Cohorts is a massively multiplayer play by mail strategy game. The current module is set in a high-magic medieval

*fantasy world."*

More often than not, they stopped listening when I said "play by mail," because they've been trying to figure out what the heck that is.

To try and draw them back in, I describe the basic concepts of play by mail

gaming without boring them too much about the details. It's impossible to describe the feeling of waiting for your turn results, wanting to know what happened to your favorite characters, your primary legion, your cities that you control on the edge of the frontier. That feeling a kid has on Christmas morning wondering what Santa might have brought him is lost on anybody that hasn't actually played a

play by mail game.

The part of the play by mail experience that instantly resonates with almost everyone is when I say, "In a typical game, you might submit a turn once a week. You get the whole week to think about and plan your turn. Then, when you're ready and you have the time, you can prepare your turn and submit it for

"I can tell by the look on their face that they're hooked. Almost every single person I've told about Cohorts would get very excited over the prospect of being able to play when their busy life permits."



*processing. You're not tied into playing at any particular time during the day or even during the week."*

I can tell by the look on their face that they're hooked. Almost every single person I've told about Cohorts would get very excited over the prospect of being able to play when their busy life permits. Finding a few hours each week at some point is a manageable task. The opportunity to join a team of other players to discuss strategies and plans and to hatch plots and schemes is very enticing.

*"I've never heard of these types of games before"* is usually something they'd say shortly after finding out it's something they're very interested in.

I try to give them a brief synopsis about the history of play by mail gaming, at least from my point of view. I tell them about how it evolved and about some of the wonderfully complex game offerings there have been. *"Some of the games I've played came with 200+ page rule books!"* I'd be all excited, talking about the level of detail these sorts of games provided and at this point, I could see



the life draining out of their eyes. The thought of having to digest a tome just to get started playing in a game is almost always more than they can bear. It's very clear that this is where they've abandoned ship and now they're thinking that I must be nuts for wanting to build a game like this, because nobody would ever want to play a game that has a 200+ page rulebook.

Without trying to justify or rationalize my love of rulebooks, I try to assuage their fears by explaining that Cohorts has a kinder, gentler approach to introducing new players to the game. I tell them about how the game guides you along and lets you know if you've neglected anything that you probably should have looked after in your turn. I tell them about how even during your initial character selection you get all the information you need to help you

choose what sort of race your character will be, what their class will be and what deity your character will worship. They all inter-relate, but you can see how each choice you make immediately affects your character. It's all in the rulebook if you want to read about it, or you can completely ignore the rules and just play the game.

... and now they're back! Now that they understand that they have a viable chance of getting to play and have fun without having to spend hours combing through a vast set of rules, they're ready to listen again.

Is this why nobody knows about play by mail games? Those of us who know and love them are all too happy to tell anybody and everybody willing to listen about the hobby we have come to love. But, the hobby itself requires a certain type of gamer. If the people we tell only feign interest while we gush on and on, it's no wonder that our tale of gaming glory ends right there. The people we tell will not pass it on because they see no fun in it. Well, they might pass it on to others because they're describing how nuts we are to love this type of game, but I don't think that helps the play by mail cause much at all.

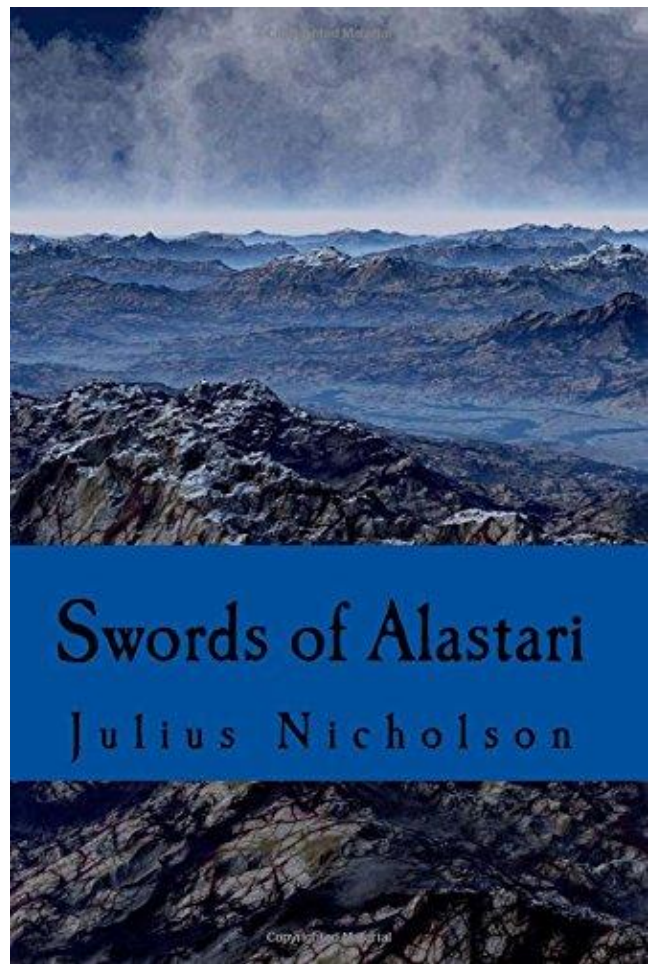
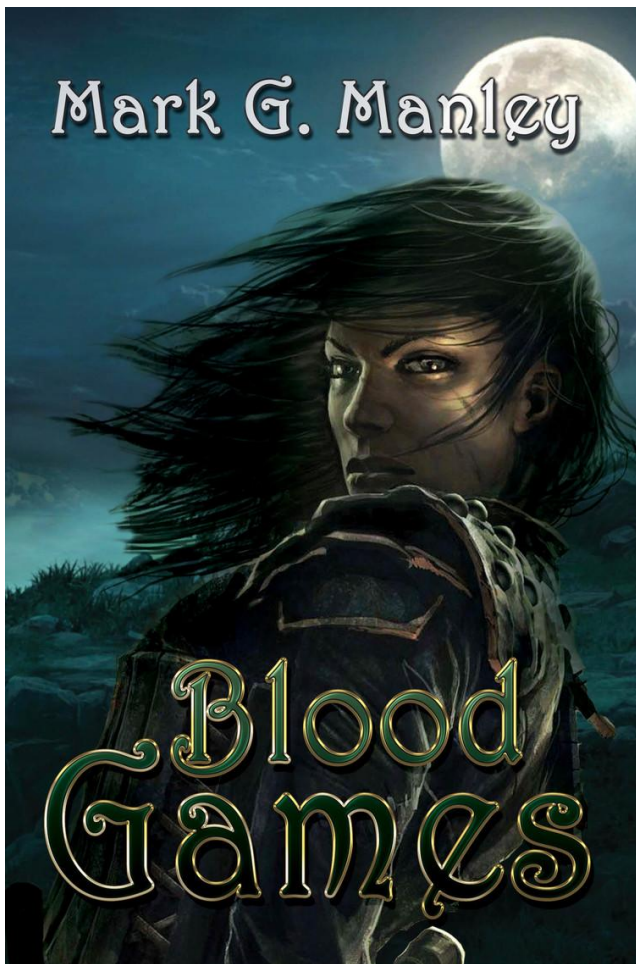
We love play by mail gaming. We know that it's not for everyone. But, we need to find a way to spread the good news. As game developers, we need to promote the industry as well as our games. As game players, we need to spread the word about the fun we have playing these types of games. In a world of instant gratification, we need to let people know that sometimes slowing down is the best way to enjoy the games we play.

Cheers,

Paul







**Do you remember? A look at a PBM game from days gone by.**

**Veiled Star**

is an imaginative, 3-Dimensional Play by Mail game set in a Gothic 23rd century. The Holy Empire has all but collapsed and anarchy reigns. You will start with an Imperial, feudal or barbarian state spanning a number of solar systems. Gunboat diplomacy, interstellar trade and hard-nosed Machiavellian power politics may just ensure your dynasty's future.

Set-up is £10 for rules, 2 turns, charts and weekly "War Correspondent" newsletter. Further turns cost £2 or send S.A.E. for info.

*Ghetto Games, 26 Speedwell Rd.  
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**EDITOR'S NOTE: This PBM game is no longer available for play. Shown for nostalgia, only!**



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# Deep Dive into Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire

## Part I - Getting Started

Sid Razavi

The long-running universe of *Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire* (BSE) has a rich history, an active player-base and a complex computer-moderated game system backed by human-moderation of special actions. For the uninitiated, the steep learning curve and sheer vastness of the rules and game world can be daunting. In this series of guides, I hope to help you get started and to tap into the richness of gaming on offer. For the first article, I will assume you know nothing about the game and how it is played. In subsequent articles, I will delve further into specific aspects of gameplay, building on this foundation. I hope this will prove informative and entertaining, enticing you to give the game a try for yourself.

### [Quick Background on Beyond the Stellar Empire](#)

Beginning from Earth, mankind developed jump technology and a unified world government in the same blip of history, forming a society which was part feudal aristocracy and part corporate oligarchy. As it's empire expanded beyond the nearby star systems, tensions led to divisions and the growing awareness that human-beings were not the only sentient species out there. In

the immediate prehistory of the game, humanity didn't face much in the way of challenge. However, as it expanded into the regions of space known as the Peripheries, it met increasingly more sophisticated aliens with their own agendas and strange new technologies.



**[Click the images that accompany this article.]**

For the past twenty years or so of gameplay, the human Empire's dominance has been challenged by various factions from rebellious Confederates and Republicans to strange aliens described by Earth-analogues such as werewolves (the Dewiek), were-cats (the Felini), tentacled monsters (the Flagritz), insectoid hive and more. Alliances formed, grew in dominance and stagnated or were betrayed. Ancient alien technologies came alive and threatened humanity. But it remained the story of the Stellar Empire and its near monopoly on power.



The situation in recent years has changed with remarkable pace. Whilst the military forces of the Republic waxed and waned, the Empire has remained strong, thanks to its ability to project force by rapidly deploying hundreds of thousands of mercenaries. The Dewiek, Flagritz and Hexamon, a hive species, have risen to counter-balance the Stellar Empire, at least in the fringes of space. Vast new peripheries like the Coreward Arm and Orion Spur have been discovered. The opportunities for humans and aliens alike to explore and claim this expanding environment are immense. New technologies are discovered with constant regularity and the political situation is best described as 'fluid'.

### How the game is played

The roots of BSE are in classical order-based PBM games from the '90s. Positions ranging from starbases, outposts, platforms, politicals, operatives, ground parties and of course, spaceships, are given a sequence of orders which are processed daily using accrued time-units (TUs). The breadth of orders can be perplexing and the inventory of possible items that can be researched, built, used and installed probably unparalleled. It is the intent of these guides to help narrow down the plethora of options to those immediately useful to new players in various activities. Discovering the nuances and multitude of options is part of the fun of playing Phoenix.

What has changed a lot from the early

days of BSE, is the interface by which the game is played. Phoenix is still at its heart a PBM where you get turn reports for each position which can be analysed to give new orders that affect the game in a deterministic way. Nowadays these orders are given using a modern web interface with the turn reports available via email and through the 'Nexus' website. This makes playing with a modern web browser essential and one recommended practice is to sign up with a specific email account that can collect old turn reports for later searching.

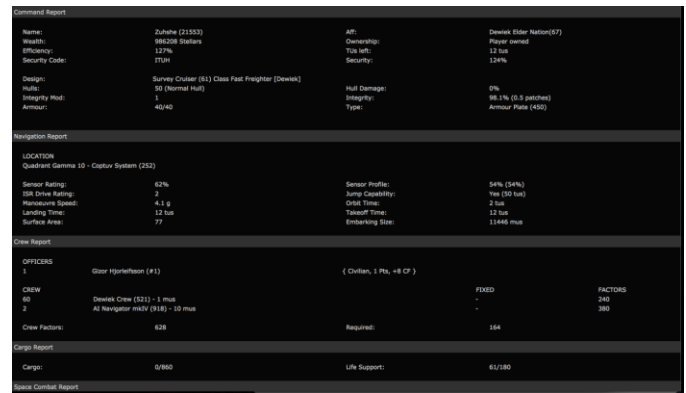
Orders are processed every weekday but this doesn't mean you must play every day. It is possible to give orders that will be followed for days, weeks or indeed months ahead for your positions. Some clever mechanisms, such as the ability to wait for TUs and sequencing order processing for positions (both your own and with other players) can help deal with some of the uncertainty involved.

Despite the granularity of detail available for each position, it is possible and in fact quite common for players to manage hundreds and even thousands of positions. The use of squadrons of ships, the standing orders that manage outposts, the long-running lines of mass production and the collaborative use of macros of orders are all part of the advanced ways in which the game can scale up for dedicated players. However, none of this is necessary to get started so whilst I may talk about them in future articles, you don't need to worry about

any of that when you sign up. My advice is to take it slowly and enjoy the wonder of the early game but know that if you want to, there is a path to greater and deeper involvement.

### Humble beginnings: Your first starship

After you [sign up](#), you will begin with your own starship fitted out as a multi-purpose exploration and trading vessel. You will also receive several messages from the game system that will help guide you through understanding the turn report for your new ship with prompts to get going with your first set of orders.

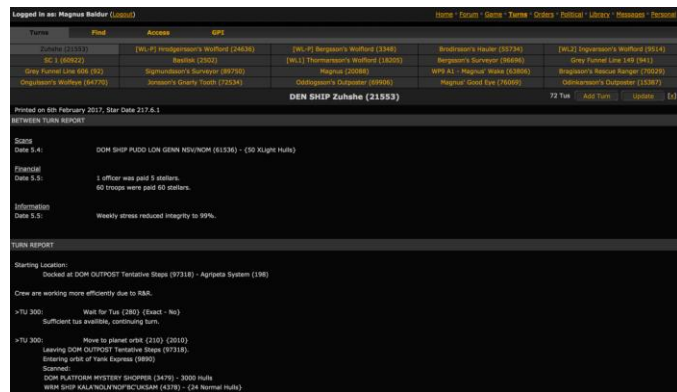


It is important to know that you need to follow this process of play:

1. Read your turn reports.
2. Add a position to the list you want to give orders to for processing.
3. Give those positions specific orders.
4. Submit those orders for processing.

A lot of new players forget the last step, although it is mentioned in the introductory messages you receive.

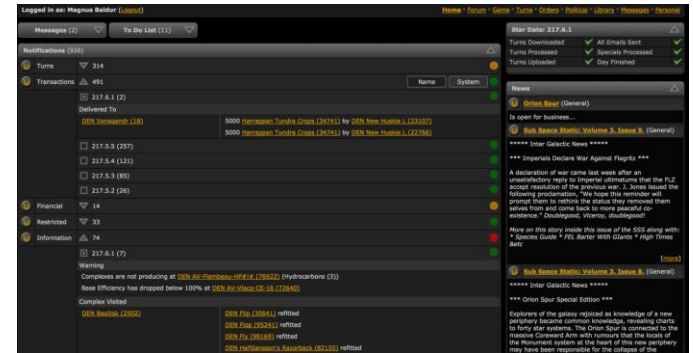
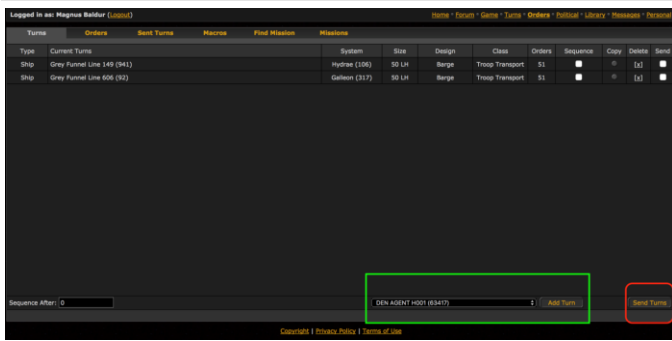
If you don't submit orders for a position, it will most likely not have any turn report generated beyond the initial report you get. There are exceptions, such as when you have pending orders and the ship has enough TUs to proceed or when starbases run their weekly maintenance. But generally, you must submit new orders to get a new turn report. Even if that is just a request for an update.



Your start up happens immediately and you can pour over your turn report; explore the public forums and extensive library of information. Your first orders won't be processed until the next processing day. Turns are processed every morning UK time with some parts of the turn processing, notably those dependent on special actions moderated by the GM, happening later in the afternoon.

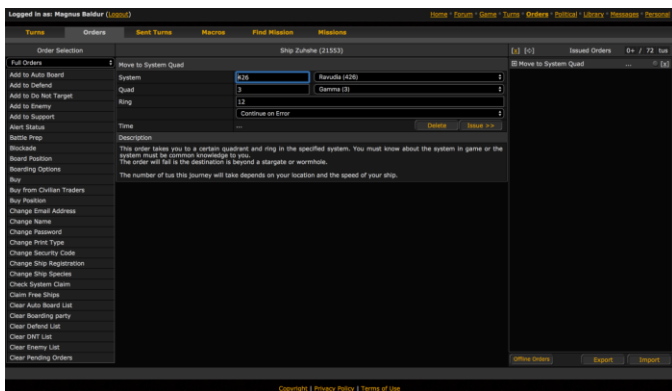


most of the time, this is how you get your positions to do things.



There are several ways to get started in giving orders to a position. From the orders screen, you can use a drop down to find the position and press the 'Add Turn' button. Or more commonly, from the turn report itself you can press the 'Add Turn' button and dive right into giving orders to that position. Later, when you have a political (see below) you will be able to do this for multiple positions at once via the political screen.

When the day's order processing is done, you will receive a notification on the home screen with details of all turns processed. Notifications are also how you will be told a lot of useful information as it becomes available. Its good practice to check the notifications every time you log in to see what may have happened to your positions, even if you didn't receive a turn report for them. For example, if you have a starbase or outpost selling goods, you will receive notifications when someone buys them from you. You will also receive more urgent notifications such as when an earthquake destroys one of your outpost complexes or when a mine is depleted.

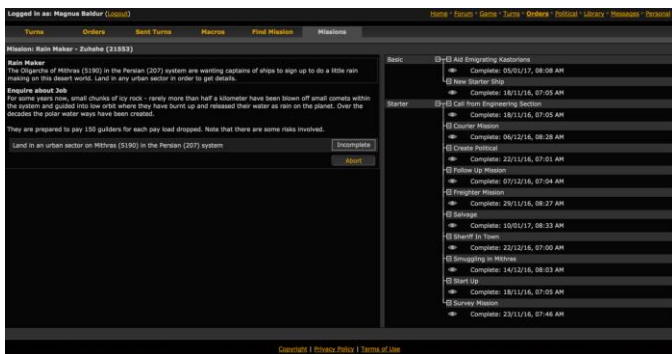


To give orders to a position you click on a specific position in the orders screen, pick from a list of available orders for that type of position (ie. Ship orders, starbase orders etc.), fill out the parameters required and click 'Issue'. There's a lot of advanced features in this screen that you don't need to worry about to begin with. For most people,

As you can see, there's been a lot of development effort to help you manage the information overload that can come as you expand your fleet and array of other positions. For now, just make sure you check out the notifications on the home page so you get a feel for the kind of events that may be going on that is relevant to you.

## Mission Creep: Building up your fleet

After you've received your first turn back from orders given to your starship, you will be guided to follow the first mission, which will lead to more missions and best of all, a way of getting more ships, some trade goods and guilders (a primitive currency) for yourself.



The early missions will hold your hand in giving orders so you can see how the system works. It won't be long however before you are just told to go somewhere, sometimes with the requisite items, to move the mission forward.

The missions give a nice flavour of the game and hopefully familiarize you with the order system and the basics of space travel. However, they are an oddity in that very little of the rest of the game works like the missions. They can be fun and rewarding but I'd recommend graduating from them quickly and even whilst doing them, move on to the next step.

## Don't Go It Alone: Picking your Affiliation

One of Phoenix's great assets, the very engine driving the game forward, is the concept of affiliations, which are (mostly) player factions. Affiliations are built around a concept, whether that is a government, alien race, corporation or something else entirely. Everything in the game is identified by the affiliation that it belongs to using a three-letter acronym.

You begin as a member of the Trainee (TRN) affiliation which puts limits on where you can go – regions of space that whilst not risk free to you, reduces certain types of gamesmanship that is deemed undesirable (e.g. using TRN for espionage in player-controlled regions of space). Whilst you can in theory stay in these confines indefinitely or even, I believe foolishly, go independent (IND), I strongly recommend finding an established and active affiliation to join as soon as you can.

If you walked in on any strategy game that's been played for twenty years and expected to make an immediate impact just on your own, you'd probably be a bit disappointed. More so in a game that has deep research trees of technologies and accumulated resources that come from claiming star systems as territories. Even if your ambitions are more modest or you are more focused on the roleplaying side of the game, you may stumble with the complexity of the rules or the political situation.



There is a more positive case for joining an affiliation: *it opens many possibilities and helps define a direction for your game, helping you to select from the opportunities available.* If you're inclined to 'go it alone', the best option is likely to be find an affiliation with less formalised or looser organisational structure where you can do just that. Your affiliation can provide you with information and advice but don't be afraid to ask questions on the Help forum. All players will do their best to help you regardless of what side you're on.

There are no permanent deaths in Phoenix, you can always pick yourself up and try again. Likewise, do not think of your affiliation choice as irreversible. It is widely accepted within the player community that players leave and join other affiliations whenever they like. Sometimes leaving means giving back positions you received from your previous affiliation but not always. Even if it is the case, perhaps because of your preference in roleplaying, you will find many affiliations have plenty of positions and resources for you to take over.

All affiliations aspire to do pretty much everything the game can offer. Sure, there are some that are more focused on a strategy or will excuse themselves from some aspect of the game but this is pretty much down to the interests and roleplaying of the players involved. Even pacifist affiliations will turn a blind eye to a player who wants to secretly run pirates on the side. And a military

government affiliation will welcome you with kisses and flowers if your interest is solely in trade or exploration.

Two important consideration for choosing an affiliation, I think, are as follows:

- **Are they active in some way?**

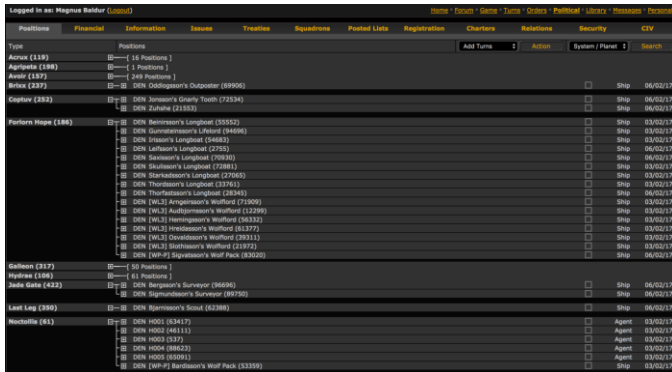
Not necessarily loud on the forums but if you can't find an active member to contact or who has contacted you, then it's probably going to end in disappointment if you join them.

- **Do I like their profile or the narrative they tell about themselves?**

You may want to be a human tycoon or Imperial governor or senator in a Republic or an alien of some description with their analogues to Earth species and cultures. You may want to be a team player or only loosely affiliated with others. This should be fairly evident from their profiles, available in the Affiliations screen, and what they say about themselves on the Recruitment forum.

I recommend posting a message introducing yourself on the Recruitment forum as soon as you can and see who responds. Gut feeling is as good as any guide for deciding. If you join and find the culture within the affiliation doesn't suit you, use your better sense of what you are looking for to find another group of hopefully more like-minded players.

## Becoming Political



You've played a few turns, done some missions, got a few ships and joined an affiliation. You've done all this at no real-world cost whatsoever. If you're happy with that then you might just decide to enrich the user interface by getting a free political position to represent your character in the game and get access to the political screen. This option is available immediately via an order which you can give to any position or via a mission that will appear in due course.

Politicals give you a centralized bank account to pay wages on your ships, saving you some hassle later, as well as generating a weekly report that gives you summaries of all your positions and your role within your affiliation.

When you create your political you will also get 10,000 stellars (currency), five new ships and access to outposts, operatives, squadrons and a variety of political orders. Just to repeat myself, you can get your political for free (no real-world cost).

Once you're ready, you might be enticed to higher cost levels of the political that give you weekly stellar incomes, subsidies for troop wages and importantly, one free starbase.

## Putting Down Roots: Outposts and Starbases

Outposts are fixed installations which can have numerous different types of complexes (buildings). Every week outposts will mine, harvest resources, run standing orders and perform research, depending on what complexes they have available and where they are located. In subsequent articles, I will talk in-depth about exploration which will lead to the information you need to decide where to build your outposts. For now, hopefully it is sufficient to know that you will typically build outposts for the following purposes:

- To mine a specific ore deposit found on a planet or asteroid.
- To harvest a resource discovered by special action exploration.
- To perform research. Although starbases are usually preferred for general research, outposts often perform location-specific research where building a starbase would be risky or not worthwhile.
- To provide facilities for your own or other people's ships such as maintenance, repair and recreation.
- To recruit employees or mercenaries from a local planetary population. Furthermore, you can train mercenaries into various troops at outposts using training



- blueprints which can be researched or bought.
- To run a market, either publicly or privately, to buy from and sell items to other players.
- To act as a place to store items you can't fit in your ships.
- Or any or all the above!

Whilst having a political is enough to build and manage outposts, if you want to produce items and trade with planetary populations at scale, you will need a starbase.

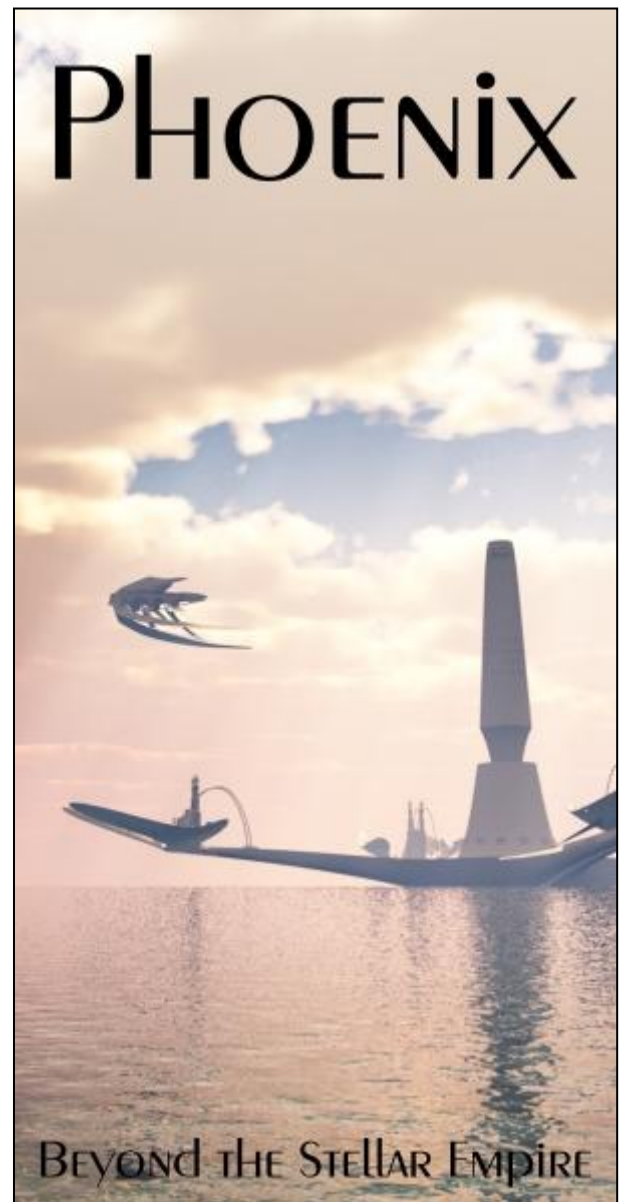
The first 'Basic' upgrade level of your political gives you a free starbase. Not only free as in no additional real-world cost but also if you claim it at one of your outposts, it will provide you with some additional complexes, troops, employees and other items to get you started. It's a good idea to do this on a suitably populated world and ideally on a good ore deposit. Alternatively, many affiliations will have a starbase ready for you if you want to jump start the process.

### Where next?

Wow, you've gone from running a single spaceship to being an active political in an affiliation with your own starbase! That isn't the end of your journey by any means. Phoenix is open-ended and the opportunities for roleplaying and strategy cannot be briefly covered in one article.

In future articles in this series, I hope to flesh out some of the details such as how

to explore the galaxy, trade with the locals, design and build your own starships, get involved in the roleplaying and politics, research new technologies and of course, partake in one of the best space combat simulations I've ever had the pleasure to experience. Hopefully I've wetted your appetite for more and would [welcome any feedback](#) you have that can help improve the series going forward. *Happy gaming!*





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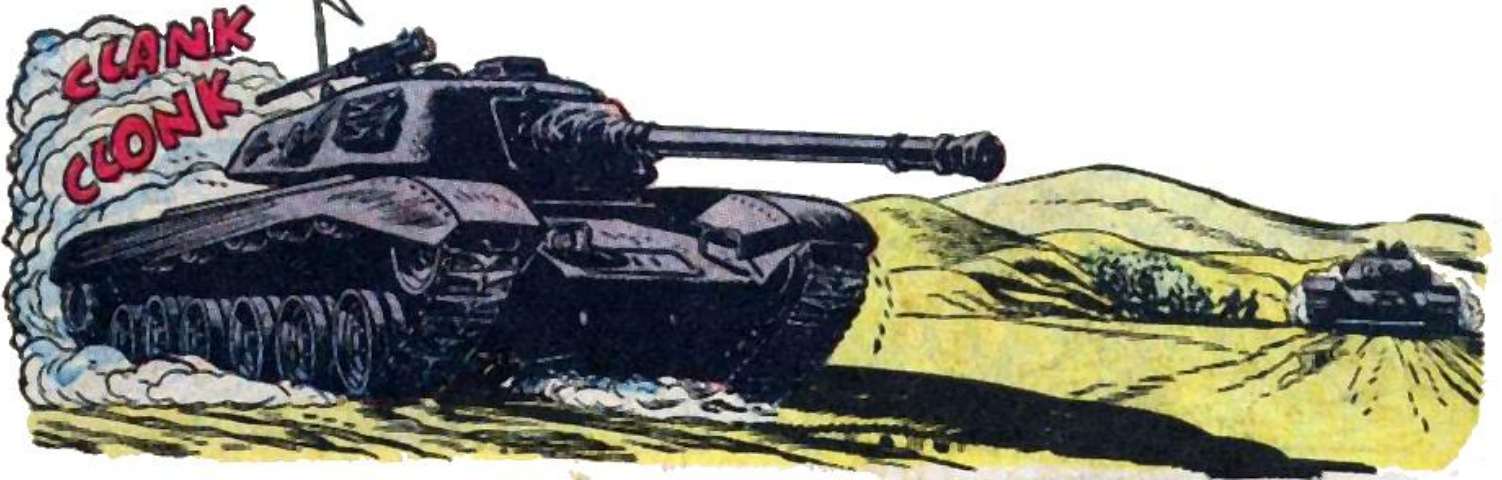
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# The "Naked Elf Lady" Ad

## A Retrospective

Davin Church

Herein lies a short tale of a rather interesting PBM advertisement that's now all but forgotten. In the long-ago age of 1983, Talisman Games (then known as Phoenix Publications) wanted to offer a newly-licensed PBM version of a game ruleset known as *Warlord*. So, it needed to do a little advertising for sign-ups to get things rolling. The question was, therefore, how best to attract the attention of prospective players.

Well, as it turned out, one of the PBM magazines of the time, probably *Nuts & Bolts of PBM*, had been running their own ad campaign to increase the readership of their

magazine. For this campaign they mentioned in each issue a free offer of some sort for any readers who could find

the picture of "the naked elf lady" hidden within the issue. This apparently succeeded in attracting the attention of much of the readership (especially in those days) who hunted carefully, issue by issue, to find the aforementioned picture and claim their reward.

As far as I know, no such picture was ever

found. But this played well into the advertising plans for *Warlord*. It would use a "naked elf lady" for its own ad, and thereby provide such a picture to be

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found, albeit not in the way the magazine publishers had intended. So, an artist well-known for drawing such images at conventions was commissioned for our own pen-and-ink drawing, which was then used for advertising and the cover of the rule book.

Unfortunately, the magazine, being a commercial entity, had legal problems with publishing nudity, even as a line drawing. They didn't want to refuse the ad, so they came up with a compromise. Their artist would touch-up the line drawing to remove the obviously nude areas and would publish the ad that way. Adding a hint of clothing with a little "air brushing" provided an image acceptable to both parties and the ad was ready to go.

*Warlord* did run a few entertaining turns but the licensor folded for unrelated reasons and the PBM game had to be cancelled. But here, for your reminiscing pleasure, is the original (un-edited) ad as it was submitted at the time. The game may be history, but the "Lady" and her story are Legend.





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# Ridin' Out the Storm

## A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 5

Douglas Neman

### **Weather Report: 3500-05**

Rex opened a channel and said, "Hey, there. We're from the empire Benevolence, Ltd. Don't laugh, we didn't pick the name. Who are you, and do you wanna hang?"

There was no reply for a few moments. When it came, it was in the form of a stilted computer voice, like one of those first-generation phones that tried

to read text messages to you. "We are from the great and glorious Heart of Fire. Surrender now and your deaths will be painless."

Rex and I gave each other a quizzical look. Rex triggered the comm link and said, "We have beer and cards."

The computerized voice said, "Okay."

As the ship approached, we saw that it had no armaments, and it was

about the same size as our ship.

"What if these guys have guns and really do kill us?" Rex asked.

I shrugged. "Then CC can demote us for dying on the job."

What amazed me was how much I

actually meant that. I suddenly realized that I just didn't give a damn. Partying with strangers is just who I am. I'll live life on my terms or not at all.

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The other ship docked, and Rex opened the hatch. The look of astonishment on his face at what he saw inside the airlock made me think, for a moment, that we really were about to die.

Rex picked his jaw up from the ground and stammered, "Uh...um...hi! Come on in. I'm Rex. That's Jake."

And in walked two of the most gorgeous women I've ever seen.

"Hi," I squeaked.

"I'm Janice," one of them said.

"I'm Veronica," said the other.

Rex and I looked around our ship, suddenly realizing what a pig sty it was. Empty beer bottles in one corner, unwashed laundry in the other, crumbs all over the console. Shame washed over both of us.

Graciously, our guests didn't say anything about it.

Janice said, *"So, anyway, sorry about the surrender demand. That was an automated message. We forgot about that."*

"Uh, hey, no problem," Rex said.

"And, uh...sorry about the mess in here," I said.

They just laughed and waved me off. "Our ship doesn't look any better!" Veronica said.

I laughed, too, trying not to get lost in her eyes. I must have looked like a doofus about ten ways from Sunday.

"You wanna beer?" Rex asked.

"Sure," they both said.

So Rex told the dispenser to produce

four beers, passed them around, and sat on the floor. Janice sat on the cushion Vance had been using, and Veronica somehow ended up in the copilot's seat next to me.

"So what was that other ship you guys were with?" Janice asked.

We told them about Vance, and what we had learned from him about his homeworld.

"Ours isn't any better," Veronica said. *"Every town has mandatory rallies and military parades at noon. Everyone adores our emperor. They have to. The ones who don't disappear in the middle of the night."*

"That's awful," I said. *"What happened to the galaxy? Why did it go mad, all of a sudden?"*

"I wish I knew," Janice said. *"It's like this is all some kind of bizarre game to someone."*

"Yeah," we all said in agreement. There was silence for a moment.

"Hey, you guys play *blindside*?" Rex asked.

"Uh...not for money, we don't!" Janice said.

"That's okay, we don't have any money, anyway," I said. *"We play for real estate."*

So we spent another evening playing



blindsided, and Veronica ended up winning the galaxy. Our guests were just as witty as Rex, and almost as witty as me.

And I've been to parties and played cards with strangers before, but this was different, somehow. Special. The four of us played and laughed for hours, there in our little corner of space. It was actually one of the best times I've had in a long, long time.

Their CC and our CC contacted our ships at almost the same time, with almost the same message: *"Why haven't you reported in, you lazy, good-for-nothing pondscum privates?"* I'm paraphrasing. I think. Janice rolled her eyes, and Veronica just looked peeved.

*"Nice to know some things are consistent throughout the galaxy,"* I said.

*"No, it really isn't,"* Veronica said, and I had to laugh at that.

So, just like with Vance, we all had to report the other empire's presence in the system back to our respective homeworlds. Neither ship could chart the system while the other was there.

Janice and Veronica got a reply first. They were ordered to stay in this system until we left, no matter how long it took. They were to chart the system as soon as we were gone.

*Oh, please, give us the same orders,* I thought desperately. That would be truly awesome if Rex and I were stuck here with Alice and Veronica, with our empires both too stubborn to budge. We could all wait out the entire freakin' war right here together!

But when our orders came through, it felt like getting punched in the gut and then stepped on by an elephant. We were to give up on this system and proceed to another.

Damn. Damn damn damn damn damn.

We reluctantly said good-bye to Janice and Veronica. I'd like to think they were reluctant to say to good-bye to us, too, but that may just be wishful thinking on my part. I'll choose to believe it.

The only silver lining – and it was a slim one – is that CC was getting skittish, so they told us to slip into the next system in stealth mode. Somehow, it doesn't make us feel any safer.

Neither Rex nor I said a word as we set the coordinates and hit the hyperdrive.

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# What did they say about Issue # 15?

"Just finished reading issues 14 & 15 back to back this morning, both were great as always!"

***"Some great articles."***

-----

"3 weeks! Got to be a record."

-----

***"A very enjoyable issue again. Congrats on the fast turnaround too."***

-----

"Two articles in this issue stand out for me. The TribeNet article by Chun-gah because I'm starting to play that game and Bernd Jaehingen's article as general interest."



***"Wow that was fast I have not finished the last one yet!"***

-----

*"Great work. Enjoyed reading it. Based on the previous issue, I decided to try TribeNet. Still early days (1 turn beyond the starting one Peter helps you with). So if the aim is to introduce PBM players to other PBM games, consider this a small mark of success and encouragement."*

Dare to populate the Internet with snippets of your opinion on any future issue of Suspense & Decision magazine. Who knows? Your words may just appear in a future episode of this page in our magazine. Stranger things have been known to happen.





# Adventurer Kings

*Game of epic adventures and imperial conquest*

# The Artist Speaks

## A brief word from the artist

A. Kaviraj

Charles asked me to write a brief article about being the cover artist for PBM magazine. I met him on Digital Webbing, where he said he needed a cover artist but couldn't pay much. This was right up my alley.

He wanted a Kirby flavor for all the covers, which makes it very difficult because I am no Jack Kirby. But I try my best. The result is I am never satisfied with any of the covers. But Charles likes them, and they serve their

function.

Of all the drawing jobs I have had, the PBM magazine covers are the ones I suffer the greatest artistic block with. I decided to just do my best and not get frustrated. Often Charles will have some vision that is very hard to realize, like a buffalo flying Santa's sleigh. Wtf.

OK, I just do my best, man. One day, I hope to produce for him a cover I am satisfied with.



**From the front cover art of Issue #2 of Suspense & Decision magazine, a buffalo pulling Santa's sleigh was intended as a visual tribute to Flying Buffalo, Inc. which was a pioneer in the field of play by mail gaming in the commercial sector.**



**WE CAN'T LET THIS  
PBM MAGAZINE CROSS THE  
FINISH LINE WITH  
ANOTHER ISSUE!**



*Matt Baker*





# Chaos to Order

## Pub Battles Strategy Guide

### Marshall Barrington

The traditional turn format of I-GO-YOU-GO is very neat and orderly. The turn sequence actually helps organize your thinking. Handy but that is not the way the real world works.

**Pub Battles** forces you to think like a real commander. Real battlefields are chaotic. Imagine a flurry of reports coming in real time, explosions, musket fire, smoke, orders going out. Half the time you don't even know where your own troops are, little lone the enemy. (In Pub Battles, each Command moves in random order as their chit is pulled. Your HQs can roll to alter this sequence.)

Just like the real world, Pub Battles are a chaotic mess. This realism is good and exciting. For new players, it can be overwhelming. Where do you even begin? Just like in the real world, you can often find yourself running from one emergency to the next. You are constantly putting out fires with knee jerk management, always 1 step behind. It is great if the enemy is

doing this. This is exactly the situation you want to create for HIM.

You need to be much more. . . premeditated. Here are some tips to help keep you on the right track.



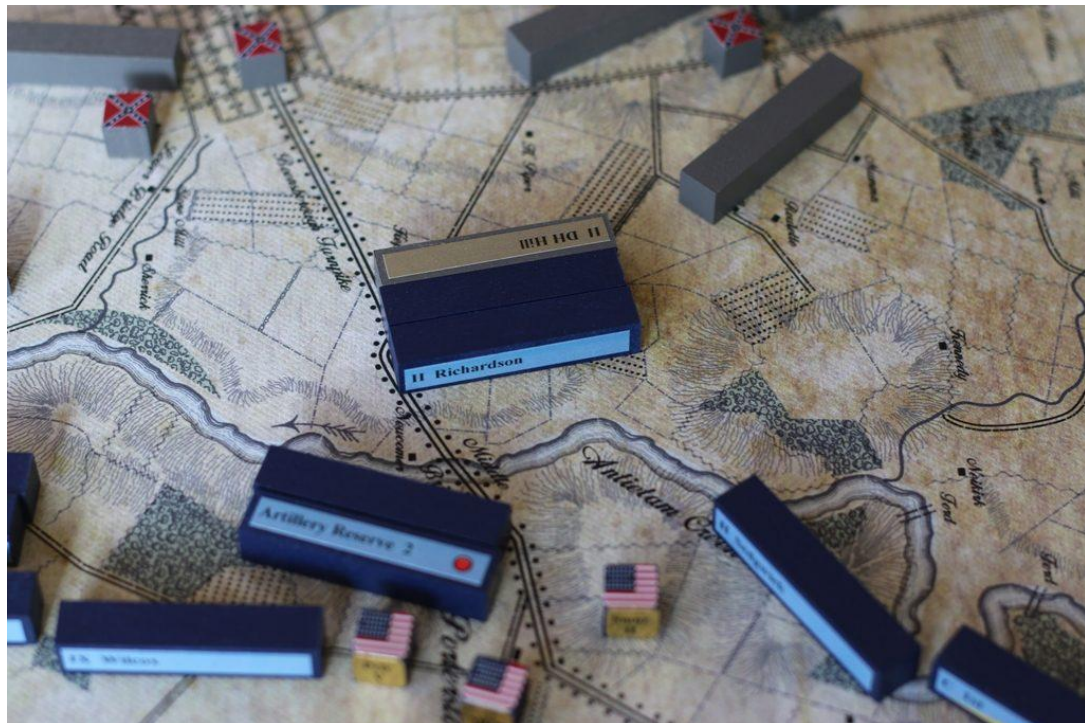
Before each turn, look at each Command. What would happen if the enemy moves first? Is that a total disaster or can you deal with it? Now what if the good guys move first? How much hurt will this put on the enemy? Do you want to move first or last? How important is this right now?



In many ways, Pub Battles is like Poker. There is hidden intel. In many ways it is like a random, chaotic street fight. New players often overlook the fact that it is also a lot like Chess. You must keep your eyes firmly fixed on 1-2 moves ahead. Where is this going? Where do you want it to go?

*Who has already moved? This is really key. The enemy command in front of you that has NOT moved, is very different from the one that HAS moved.*

Now that you know who needs to go first or last, should you roll now for HQs? No. Big mistake. Just sit tight. Bide your time. Let's see who comes out of the chute first. Maybe it's you! You got first move naturally. Great! If the enemy doesn't like it and tries to roll, there is a good chance they miss. That gives you intel. You know what the enemy wanted and you know he's not happy. If the enemy jumps ahead of you, you can still have the last say by jumping ahead of him. Notice what happens if you jump the gun and roll to go first? You just wasted your roll. If the enemy jumps ahead of you now, you have no chance to alter. You wasted it!



Sit up and pay attention if the enemy starts rolling to change a chit pull suddenly. That means they are in danger. They don't like the way it came down. If the enemy doesn't like it, that means you do! Do what you can to counter their changes. If this threat wasn't on your radar, you better start asking yourself why? What would happen if the sequence stays as it is? What is the enemy so afraid of? What can you do to maximize their pain?

### Move First When:

- The enemy is spent. Move to engage them. This will force them to fall back or fight you on unfavorable terms.
- Critical terrain is currently unoccupied.

- The enemy can block off routes of escape.
- You can move up to block a key route of the enemy's escape or attack.

### Move Last When:

- You plan on falling back but want to delay the enemy. Just make sure you can still get out!
- When expecting an enemy attack. If he goes first, you can commit support afterwards.
- When attacking prepared positions, so the enemy cannot react.

If your artillery is in a separate command, try to get them to move right before your attacking command moves. That way you can contact the enemy defenders before they can Rally. Also the defenders may flat out run, so you can occupy their good terrain without a fight.

If you must attack first, make sure you guard your flanks! Attack all the defenders in the line. If you can't, you will need an extra piece on your flanks.

If you attack last, you don't have to worry about this technically. You can make isolated attacks. Just keep in mind what could happen if the enemy moves first next turn.



If you do move last, try to think ahead to the next turn. What could you do with a double move? Try to setup the first blow now.

orders, which opens up a plethora of communication problems. Now you're really in command.

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# Brandywine



## Pub Battles™





Announcing Another Alamaze Breakthrough:

## THE READY BUTTON!

On New Year's Day 2017, Alamaze unleashed the highly anticipated Ready Button for its two player DUEL format games. See the free DUEL promotion below.

Instead of waiting for a scheduled deadline to arrive, players in DUEL advance to the next turn the minute after both players indicate they are "Ready" by pressing the new Ready Button. Players in DUEL decide which of the 24 kingdoms each will control in Centauria and agree to a maximum time between turns, which can be from minutes to a week. Some comments from players here in the past couple days on DUELS with the Ready Button:

"If you haven't tried playing a duel game with the ready button yet I **highly recommend** it. It is a fast paced addictive **adrenaline rush version of Alamaze**." - *Hawk*

"**The "READY" button rocks.** I have already completed two duals since it came out. The first last 12 turns over 3 days and the second 9 turns over 2 days. It really is a lot of fun being able to keep your plan and objectives fresh in your mind." - *Jumpingfist*

"Enjoying my game so far. I've made a few rookie mistakes but so far I haven't repeated any. **Exciting stuff!**" - New player *Calidor*

"I played the full 18 turns the first time I played against my brother in our free duel. He caught my military twice out in the open and crushed me both times but my wily emissaries kept me in it till the game ended when it hit the max 18 turn cap". - *Imperial Tark*

## ALAMAZE PRESENTS DUEL! PLAY FREE!

DUEL is our exciting new format in Alamaze, made doubly so with the introduction of the Ready Button. Just two kingdoms on the beautiful new Centauria map. Just one opposing player to consider and some elements like sea power removed, it is the best way for less experienced players to hone their Alamaze skills, as well as a brisk, intense contest for experienced players with a friend or rival frenemy. Join a DUEL with a friend, or join solo by posting in the DUEL Arena on the forum. As we introduce DUEL with the **Ready Button**, we are offering a **free game** of DUEL. Send an email to [signup@alamaze.co](mailto:signup@alamaze.co) indicating your desire to try DUEL free. We'll take it from there. No credit card info needed. Rules and Map are on the website and the forum. Experience Alamaze at no risk. It's your time.



PLAY

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

# Asgard

## Hyborian War Kingdom Spotlight

Ben Lynch

*"Pressed by the Nordic tides, the Cimmerians were on the march, destroying first Gunderland, then hewing their way through the Pictish hosts to defeat the Nordic-Nemedians and sack some of their cities. Then they continued eastward, overthrowing an Hyrkanian army on the borders of Brythunia. Hot on their heels, hordes of Aesir and Vanir swarmed South, and the newly founded Pictish Empire reeled beneath their strokes."* - **The Hyborian Age, by Robert E. Howard.**

This irresistible migration of the Aesir, driven forth by the crushing cold of a new Ice Age to overthrow all before them in fire and blood, is the goal of every Aesir player in every game of Hyborian War. However, it is no mean feat to reach the Ice Age, when all players, from the distant South to the staggeringly distant East, must bear the violence of barbarian arms no matter their diplomatic guile. For your fellow players know this, and rest assured, even the distant monarchs of Uttara Kuru will

"This irresistible migration of the Aesir, driven forth by the crushing cold of a new Ice Age to overthrow all before them in fire and blood, is the goal of every Aesir player in every game of Hyborian War."

have you in their minds and may make mischief against you long before the time comes when you descend upon them from the North like a pack of wolves to shatter their victory progress - never mind the large kingdoms, whose home provinces can accelerate your ranking even faster.

However, while all this must be borne in mind, Asgard must survive the early part of the game, and that, too, can be difficult.

Survive this period, and all will be well. Choose poorly, and you will be defeated. I have played two Asgards. One ended blotted out by the wrath of Hyperborea, while the other, having been in first since the very first war season, took off like a shot off a shovel to first place and never looked back. Be advised that every game is different, and only you know best any given strategic and tactical situation for your kingdom, so if what follows does not suffice for your purposes, do not hesitate to improvise. That, more than anything else, is my manner of playing. Maximize your turn every turn and minimize your costs every opportunity



you can, and you will outperform the pack, but that's easier said than done.

## The Enemies

**Hyperborea:** Hyperborea contains imperial goals and, despite their weak troops, they constitute the greatest threat to Asgard by far. With their battle magic in set piece, they can grind Asgard down from the start of the game, and with their court, they can peace you at will while denying you peace, tying your hands on other fronts. They must be dealt with, one way or the other. However, with patience and daring, you can handle Hyperborea.

**Vanaheim:** Like Hyperborea, they need a piece of you. They are the weaker party, but they are not to be taken lightly. While Vanir troops are inferior, they can give as good as they get. Under an experienced player, they can be formidable enough to finish off an Asgard that is unwary. They also have a stronger court than Asgard at game start, excluding their ruler, whom often doesn't last long. This means they can peace you and avoid you while also spying you, which can cause no end of headache, as you only start with one superior diplomat. Thus, watch out for Vanir killers - they're not Zamorans, but they're good enough to kill crucial characters if he catches you slipping.



## Allies

**Cimmeria:** Cimmeria makes a great ally and will give you access to conquests South of him in Aquilonia and the Border Kingdom. While Aquilonia is always tough, the Border Kingdom can be a great target for early gains in provinces and your economy. Also, while mutually peaced at game start, it's important to remember it won't last. Make friends. It's worth it.

**Aquilonia:** Aquilonia can make a great friend, too, if you elect to be enemies with the Cimmerians. On the other hand, you have to connect with him to make it worthwhile, and that's not necessarily going to happen. Nonetheless, maintain good relations, because it doesn't hurt you and he can, if you break out of the North, cause you great pain.

**Hyperborea:** If you can't beat them, you should consider joining them. It's worth exploring because Hyperborea can make for a great route to warmer climes if you find yourself cut off. In a game predicated upon expanding to victory or dying in stagnation, don't reject this alliance out of hand.

## The Court

With two games as Asgard, I've had great experience with the court. You will

get a strong mix of nobles, priests, generals, and heroes with a bit of luck. As a note, not every court member will perform the same mission with the same success in the same campaign - but we go to war with the court we have, not the one we would like.

**Asga-Cha: Lyse Rann** - Dispose of him immediately via an adventure. He is a liability and nearly anyone will be better.

**Asga-Adj: Roemaf Njal** serves well as a protector or a general. Since you've plenty of muscle, put him in the armies.

**Asga-1: Wold Njord** is the best of the barbarian kings, being blessed with superior rulership, unlike Vanaheim, Cimmeria, and Pictland. Have him rule and protect him, and you will be blessed with high loyalties and high levies. Protect him, though, for you will miss him if a Vanir murderer slips a blade between his back. On the other hand, Asgard seems to have no trouble producing great monarchs.

**Asga-2: Woneorn Njord**, son of Wold, makes for an excellent monarch, too, and beyond that, he's not much good for anything else.

**Asga-3: Kryl Rann**, first of Wold's thanes, makes for a mighty war leader in my experience. He never seems to not get open field battles if I want them, despite his only having an excellent military leadership stat. If you want momentum to cut through enemy provinces in a blitzkrieg, Kryl is a good bet.

**Asga-4: Thrave Njal** serves as another great general. Pair him with Kryll. He is old, though, so he won't last beyond the first set.

**Asga-5: Thror Ironhand**. With superior combat and good heroism, you might think he'd be a great hero, but for me, it seemed he couldn't do anything beyond get himself locked up. Keep him on protection or in any army.

**Asga-6: Geof Njord** is an adequate combat hero with excellent heroism. He has a force march spell. Put him in an army and have him cast that spell.

**Asga-7: Valak Njord**, the second son of Wold, has a tongue of honey and charisma to match. He is your most dear and sole superior diplomat. Guard him well and he will last you many turns. Slip up, and he will be killed by an assassin, which could be quite the disaster early in the game. Beloved of the Gods is Valak, for he can cast Prophecy.

**Asga-8: Ymane Njek** is a priest with good diplomacy skills. Use him as best you can to back up Valak "Honey-Words" and you will do well with him. Since you're light on diplomacy, guard him as well until someone better arrives.

### The Aesir Military

The Aesir have slow barbarian infantry and archers. There's only two types you need to know: Type 2 and Type 3.

Type 2, the fabled Wolfraven Reavers, are widely considered the best infantry in the game, even though Cimmerian Old



Warriors have a similar profile, with their superior morale and excellent melee combat ability. Raise these as much as you can and everything else second. In open field, they literally vaporize anything that isn't of similar quality.

Type 3, Arcadian Raiders, are actually amazingly good at defending against raiders and at raiding others. Try to keep them in provincial armies and only raid on the PY, when it might actually be worth the losses. Solid, massive raids during the Peace Years can enrich the treasury.

Types 1 and 4 are fine, but keep them at the minimum and try not to put them in the armies until the Ice Age. Do everything you can stack the Reavers in your imperial armies.

However, sometimes this will not be possible. Your armies are slow. It is always best to have them working on one front because of this and, when it comes between sending in the smaller army without other types in favor of Reavers, I elect to put in the lesser troops because Ymir favors the big battalions when it's crunch time. However, only do this when the gains are worth the losses. A less than awesome

field army is better than no army.

You will find it difficult to raise troops beyond the first few turns after a peace year early to mid game, and most of your provinces will not give as much revenue as you would like, so watch your troop base, supposing you didn't conquer

Hyperborean provinces, which, let's face it, you probably won't. Your treasury, even when filled with tribute from Turan and others, will vanish quickly. On the other hand, when it's gone, you will be able to write as many intents as you like without concern, so there's an upside.

### **A Tale of Two Asgards: A Case Study**

The First Asgard: Most know that Asgard has very easy victory progress if they take provinces. Of course,

keeping it is a challenge. While playing in character dictates that you not cut a deal with your adversaries, that you threaten death and damnation upon Vanaheim and Hyperborea, you would be wise to consider cutting a deal with one or the other.

In my first Asgard game, I had the opportunity to isolate Vanaheim and receive free passage over the Vilayet from the Hyperboreans in return for troubling them not. They will be eager to

"While playing in character dictates that you not cut a deal with your adversaries, that you threaten death and damnation upon Vanaheim and Hyperborea, you would be wise to consider cutting a deal with one or the other."

offer you this deal more often than not, because while the war is in favor of a canny Hyperborea, Asgard can grievously injure him even if he wins. Thus, you should strongly consider it. Hyperborea has more wealth and a powerful diplomatic court. A strong Hyperborean player should peace you with ease and you will find it difficult to lay a hand on him until the Ice Age. He may also avoid 281 entirely and instead make for 278 and 280 via Open Field, cutting you off without allowing you that all important battle. You will need to consider your luck.

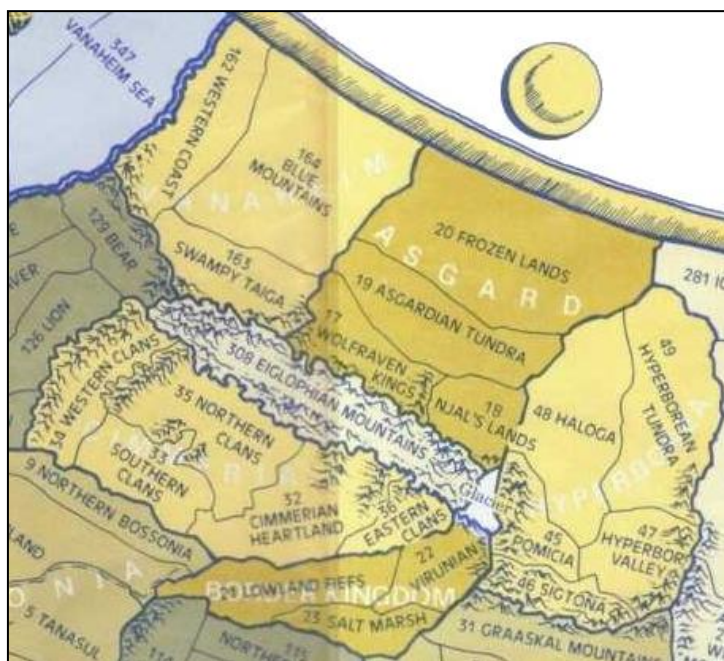
Dead set on war with Hyperborea, I made nice with Vanaheim and moved both armies to 281, going for Open Field and trying to reinforce if it went set piece. I also attempted to peace him, but I did not, even with tribute. This left me broke, and, having been peaced by Hyperborea and Vanaheim, I was boxed in, waiting for the Hyperborean invasion, which came, and, because he had grown stronger and had his court stacked, he won both battles and cut me in two, leaving me effectively destroyed. While others urged perseverance, it was

obvious Hyperborea would peace me ruthlessly until the end of the game, and I didn't mind it. I recognized defeat. I should have taken the deal.

## The Second Asgard

**First Warset:** In the second game, deciding nothing succeeds like success, and a great offense makes a better defense, I eschewed doubling up on an invasion of 281, electing instead to slam

into 308 with the second army after activating it. Meanwhile, Hype tributed me off the bat and I elected to make friends with him, seeing no choice. Both invasions went open field and I hit superior progress and first place that very turn. If you repeat this with success, you will most likely achieve the same result.



**Asgard is one of 36 player kingdoms in the game of Hyborian War. Hyborian War is run by Reality Simulations, Inc..**

Having made common cause with Hype, this allowed me to turn my attentions on Vanaheim, who, by not sorting his troops, suffered horrendous defeats at the hands of the Aesir Reavers, who knocked out his mediums like juiced Barry Bonds whomping up in the Home Run Derby. These victories and the deal with Hyperborea effectively saw me gain a



route to the East, and let me defeat my opponent in Vanehim. However, despite the brutal beat down delivered to Vanaheim, Turan invaded Icy Deserts 265 with his navy, and peaced me, cutting me off from the East - which he did until the Ice Age. Meanwhile, Vanaheim dug in while I took Bear from a crushed Pict. I closed with three armies, though, and maintained superior progress.

The one major error in this scenario was failing to continue to invade Vanaheim. With Vanaheim reduced to one province, I wished to maintain my troop base rather than finish him off since I couldn't take the province due to the storm rule. I supposed he would recognize he'd been walloped and that my superior resistance would never allow him to peace me, so I parked two imperials on his borders and waited for him to drop. He did not. Had I realized he had no desire to drop without being beaten to a pulp, I would have invaded him every turn for total losses in set piece. leaving him with nothing so he could not mistake the message. If you beat someone, sometimes it is best to beat them beyond a reasonable doubt of your ability to do so - particularly if you've surrounded them.

Looking at the situation, I thanked the stars for my early alliance with

Cimmeria, and elected to offer an alliance to Hyperborea. Cimmeria, having been caught off guard by the Border Kingdom as he pushed into a fierce Pict resistance, lost the Cimmerian Heartland, but retook it, only to lose Eastern Clans to close the set.

### **The Second War Set**

Over the Peace Years, I received some more diplomacy and strong generals and rulers, while losing heroes to deaths. I

**"If you beat someone, sometimes it is best to beat them beyond a reasonable doubt of your ability to do so - particularly if you've surrounded them."**

avoided the Border Kingdom and elected to peace Vahaheim. When that was rejected, I sent tribute and told him he wasn't worth my time. He responded by hunting down Asga-1 and Asga-7 and killing them. Meanwhile, his ravaged troop base replenished itself as he held on, plotting revenge and

concentrating a tremendous amount of force in one province.

All of this this made things more difficult, as Turan dumped tribute on me, locking Asgard into the Northwest, so I began to move on the Border Kingdom, who had peaced both Cimmeria and Hype and held onto Eastern Clans. I moved into 308 while invading Northern Brythunia, taking Graskaals and Marsh Plains back to back in Open Field, putting me at Salt Marsh with a ready intent while also intending on Eastern Clans with my second and third armies in 308, having

lost all my treasury already.

I ended up seizing Salt Marsh in Open Field, but found myself stuck in set piece in Eastern Clans. The Border Kingdom withdrew to Virunian with his armies while I pressed forward into Lowland Fiefs, then Nemedra, which had dropped and took my first large kingdom

province,

Northern

Marches to end the set with five armies. I then

looked at a

pretty powerful Aqvi controlling much of

Pictland, Argos,

and Zingara, decided I wanted no part of him, and elected to make an alliance with him in pursuit of victory points.

Aquilonian troops are tough enough and in enough quantity to destroy an unwary Aesir in the early game, and Border Kingdom and Vanir troops remained opposed to me. Three problems of this type are one too many for Asgard to handle by arms alone.

### **Third Set: Asgard First - or Valhalla First**

The crux is this - if you are in first, and you want to stay in first, you need to grow and you need to avoid losing troops if you can. If you have a dropped Nemedra and a played Aqvi to attack, you attack the dropped Nemedra for the victory progress and lower casualties as well as the rich provinces.

More, I had decided to resolve the Vanaheim problem for once and for all by beating him senseless. I had only five armies and would not be tributating him. So I had three armies tied down against Vanaheim, leaving only two for offensives elsewhere. There remained a chance that the Border Kingdom would not be peaced and attack as well.

Therefore, a war against Aquilonia seemed like a poor decision while at least four imperial armies of enemy troops remained in my back in Vanaheim and

along my lines into Central Hyboria. Therefore, despite Cimmeria's urging, Asgard declined to make war on Aquilonia. This, along with gentle words from Asgard, convinced Aquilonia not to attempt to rescue the Border Kingdom.

These three problems could have destroyed the strong but fragile Aesir position in Hyboria. Therefore, Aquilonia was in, and that had to be that if the Vanir and Border Kingdom problems were to be solved to my satisfaction.

Once you've made that decision, do your best to convert Aquilonia to your cause even if you are friends with his enemy Cimmeria because, at the end of the day, coordinating a coalition to attack Aquilonia or any other strong kingdom, large or not, is one of the most difficult and challenging things to manage. It requires sharing intelligence, planning



**Reality Simulations, Inc operates out of Tempe, Arizona. In addition to running *Hyborian War*, RSI also runs the popular *Duel II* game, formerly known as *Duelmasters*.**



offensives, and good communications by everyone. This all takes time - time which some of your allies may not have.

Meanwhile, the opponent merely needs to thwart all or only part of your plans. You may only get one shot and if it's not a killer, any target, let alone Aquilonia, can and will peace someone, throwing your plans into disarray.

Thus, if you have a coalition, it's more to your advantage to deter others than it is to actually destroy them because most of the time, you will never bring to bear the power of your coalition. It is better to have the iron hand on the table than to strike with it and have the opponent discover it doesn't hurt as much as he supposed.

As for Cimmeria, he accepted my decision because Cimmeria got to conquer territory, too, and Asgard had destroyed his most inveterate foe, the Border Kingdom.

For all the foregoing reasons, if you are in a similar position against a powerful kingdom as a barbarian, you should not attack Aquilonia or, for that matter, any other played position if you have easier routes to victory progress. Also, you should not want him to oppose you as you move into Nemedica with Cimmeria, who will also see the value of taking a dropped kingdom's provinces.

Remember, you want to grow your troop base and your economy. Taking wealthy large kingdom provinces that will not be contested with ferocity is always the correct move. Also important - by this time, you can begin to consider the migration to come and who must be destroyed. It may be that the immediate obstacle is not the obstacle you make it

out to be. Aquilonia was not in contention for the top five, let alone the top three. Therefore, he could only be an obstacle if Asgard elected to make him one.

On the other hand, if you play for fun alone, and not victory, muster the clans and the tribes and

descend upon the Aquilonian marches. Be advised that overrunning the Aquilonian frontier of Northern Bossonia and Westermarck is not an easy feat even with open field advantage if it has been prepared. If at all possible, go around it into Tanasul.

The Aquilonian gambit paid off well, as I managed to destroy Vanaheim, but the battles were brutal and savage even when I met him directly with intelligence from other parties. We shredded three full armies between the two of us, and he never took a single province. Again, he brought mixed armies of mediums and again I brought nothing but heavy troops.

**"It is better to have the iron hand on the table than to strike with it and have the opponent discover it doesn't hurt as much as he supposed."**

The war ended with him dropping and the Aesir taking the Western Coasts, but the Aesir took massive casualties against them that could have been avoided by simply wiping out his troop base on the first set- the storm does not matter if you think there's a chance he will not drop and will pose a threat to you in the future. If you have the means to continue to make him miserable and deprive him of any doubts about defeat, never fail to make him understand. My failure to make him understand cost the Aesir a great deal. Those three full armies burned in a savage war against the Vanir over several turns could have easily been used for a war against Aquilonia or to invade Nemedica or territories in Brythunia via Hyperborea. Instead, they died to take one province that would have most likely been abandoned by the end of the first war set.

Nonetheless, the Aesir managed to conquer most of Nemedica and even Khorshemish by the end of the set, leaving Tor to Cimmeria and Belverus to the Nemedian AI. With an economy secured, the Aesir would raise massive wealth and troops on the next Peace Years turn and enter the Ice Age with eight armies.

"This was the most frustrating war I have ever fought. I repeatedly lost in open field battles. I learned a great deal about end game tactics from the anonymous Turanian player."

## To the Ice Age and Beyond

If there's a theme for being a successful Aesir, or any Hyborian Kingdom, it's to be flexible. Always go where the conquering can be done - not where you would like it to be done. Many Aesir players strive to head into the East - and they should. Unfortunately, Turan managed to prevent that conquest for the whole of the game. Ironically, rather than fretting and fuming, the Aesir descended through Hype and into Hyboria's heart, destroying Brythunian and Nemedian armies and continuing to make good progress, ultimately achieving, after the third full set, the necessary economy to compete with any kingdom in the game for troop raises.

Once Asgard achieves a powerful economy and you are standing in the top ranks, slow down the engines of war and only seize those provinces you can conquer without much trouble and focus on building your troop base. Prepare to tear down your opponents for rank.

Begin, if you have not already, to make overtures to people who have something to gain from the downfall of those that rival you in the rankings. In this case, Kusan, Turan, and Tombalku were in second, third, and fourth. As a result, I



reached out to Vendhya to encourage him against Turan and Kusan even as I threatened Tombalku if he did not attack Turan. Hyperborea also prepared to attack. Meanwhile, Cimmeria had received Eastern Clans back from the Aesir and migrated toward Kusan to undermine his victory progress after the Peace Years.

Feeling strong, I ignored my Ice Age target, Aquilonia, now dropped, to attack Turan. This was the most frustrating war I have ever fought. I repeatedly lost in open field battles. I learned a great deal about end game tactics from the

anonymous Turanian player. Rather than continue to expand on all fronts and pay tribute to his enemies, the Turanians moved their armies close to home and set all their provinces to open field with defensive armies on stand by. He did not pay tribute to anyone. He readied for war.

As for Tombalku, while Asgard outclassed him, he remained in a strong fourth and, therefore, he would suffer invasions of his victory provinces and capital by the Aesir armies. While he was not likely to

overtake Asgard, if you are playing for a win, do not allow your opponent to maintain progress if you are not absolutely certain of the solidity of your lead.

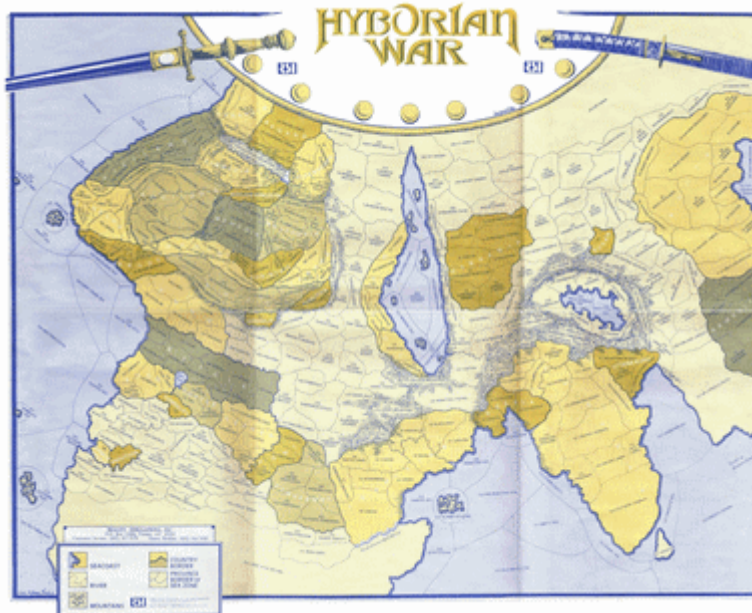
When the final war set began, despite initial optimism and faith in the Aesir Reavers, when Aesir armies struck into

North Turan on a broad front of Yaralet to Shahpur, hordes of mercenary defensive armies composed of heavy cavalry reacted and outlasted the Aesir every single time. Full armies of thirty reavers suddenly became broken

armies of seven to eight troops each. What had happened?

Defensive armies full of mercenaries cost less than you suppose and will outlast you if they show up in enough numbers - more, he will instantly replace the mercenaries but you will not replace your reavers.

If the defensive armies did not materialize, I took the province, but I never took a Turanian home province and would have been better served



**Click on the map image above to be taken to a larger version of the Hyborian War wall map.**

avoiding the full rush. I only managed to seize territories when his defensive armies failed to react, which was very rare. Out of perhaps twenty invasions, I took and held only Zamboula by the end of the game.

Nonetheless, my coalition allies in Hyperborea and Vendhya managed to push him back, but not nearly enough to assist my invasions against his heartland. At one point, the Aesir lost seven battles in Turan back to back, leading to an Aesir army invading Tombalku to quit the field in demoralization without actually engaging the enemy, something I had never seen before.

Therefore, when you reach the end - do not be too arrogant. Even after Asgard threw caution and casualties to the wind by throwing sixty reavers into Aghrapur itself, Turan managed to time the battle out in open field before the oncoming Aesir could completely secure the province. So understand, even if you look unstoppable on paper, you can and will be defeated by a powerful kingdom in open field if they prepare for you even if you have the best infantry in the game. If you are playing for the win - go where the enemy cannot win, not where you think you can make the biggest impression on your fellow players.

**HYBORIAN WAR** is a Play-By-Mail game of battle, intrigue, and diplomacy set in the unmatched Hyborian Age of Conan. You will rule one of over 30 different Kingdoms re-created from the Conan legend.

Praise to Ymir, though, the massive economy retrieved what otherwise would have been a disaster and the Aesir continued to raise enough Reavers and Raiders to make headway on the board and continued to invade, though not

nearly with as many troops as at the start of the migration. By the end, the wealth of Nemedra managed to give the Aesir the strength to take Zamboula and pieces of Stygia and Tombalku's victory provinces, ending the game in first place with ten armies and twenty nine provinces. Turan, by far, had the better of it in this war, though he would have broken in two more rounds as attrition began

to eat into his total troop base.

If victory progress had been the only driver of the end game, the better move would have been to invade an unplayed Aquilonia, an unplayed Stygia, and the very well played but weak Tombalku. With over 300 Aesir troops weighted toward Reavers, it would have been a massive Asgard, especially juxtaposed to the fiery crucible offered by a well prepared and canny Turanian set on victory or death. It is by such methods, by devouring the dropped territories, that you can see a barbarian kingdom with sixty or a hundred provinces at the end of the game.



What did the massive Ice Age offensives launched by Asgard accomplish? They benefited mostly other players by preventing effective Turanian responses to Vendhyan and Hyperborean aggression and may have possibly prevented Turan continuing to expand and take first place.

Nonetheless, outlasting Turan in the standings made it more satisfying to myself than to have grabbed more unplayed provinces. As importantly, I learned how to defend against a barbarian invader with some panache. I felt that I had fought for the victory as opposed to having run away with the victory - my Aesir kingdom had grown into a mighty power that could battle the most powerful country on the board, no matter what the victory standings said, and even if the Aesir lost battle after battle, Asgard ultimately won the war and never failed to keep the initiative against not only the mighty Turanians, but the intrepid Tombalkans!

It is highly unlikely that you, dear reader, will ever be able to play any Aesir game resembling this victory in detail, but I believe you can, if you read and reflect closely, play it in spirit.

#### **Conclusions:**

Do not make too many enemies.

Make friends across the board.

Avoid heavy casualties early in the game.

Do not fail to put an enemy down

completely if you have the chance.

Do what you must when you can't do what you want.

Always put your kingdom first.

Always give good service to your allies.

Prepare for the Ice Age.

Destroy the opponents ahead of you.



The advertisement features a dark, ornate banner at the top with the text "FORGOTTEN REALMS" in a stylized, golden font. Below the banner is a silver dagger with a red hilt, and the text "DUEL II" in a bold, red, stylized font. The main title "HYBORIAN WAR" is written in a large, golden, gothic-style font. At the bottom, the text "Reality Simulations, Inc. has been producing fine play-by-mail games since 1984!" is displayed in a bold, black font, followed by the website address "www.reality.com" in a blue, underlined font.

**Reality Simulations, Inc. has been producing fine play-by-mail games since 1984!**

[www.reality.com](http://www.reality.com)





# GMT GAMES

- Conquer Planets
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- Build Fleets
- Build Armies
- Build installations
- Find Relics

## GOTHIC HAMMER

Struggle to survive in an unforgiving universe

# www.GothicHammer.com

Gothic Hammer is a FREE browser based online space opera game. The game has 10,000 sectors in the starting quadrant so it is small enough to actually get to know players yet big enough to go off into the frontiers if you like semi-solitary play. The game is easy to play but the strategies are deep. PLAY FOR 6 MOVES and YOU'LL BE ADDICTED!!!! (In a good way)



# Where We're Heading...

As always, we're headed into uncharted territory. Every issue is uncharted, every step of the way along this journey remains an unknown, until we cross that Rubicon that each issue represents.

In your hands, you hold Issue #16 of *Suspense & Decision* magazine. I hope that you will enjoy it! I enjoy publishing it, even if I do manage to stumble into publishing quicksand, every now and again.

If you're able to find the time and to do so, I would very much appreciate it if you take a moment out to send in your thoughts to me on how you think that we're doing. Both compliments and criticisms, as well as neutral observations, are equally appreciated!

Submissions of new articles and reviews, not to mention submission of

photographs and art, are always eagerly received.

I would take this opportunity to try and encourage PBM companies and game moderators to send in news, events, and happenings about things going on in your respective neck of the woods. Even if what you're doing isn't PBM-related, we still want to hear from you, if you or your company have PBM roots or turn-based inclinations.

Spring seems to have come early, here. If any of you reading this happen to be planting a garden be sure to send in pictures of your garden. Not sure what I'll be planting, this year - but I'm hoping to plant something!

This new year, I am trying to maintain a monthly rate of publication for *Suspense*

& *Decision*. Even if I don't make the first day of each month's publication deadline, I still try to stick pretty close to it - within a week of it, or thereabouts.

So, if we do meet with the occasional delay, don't despair! We're still here, and we're still tinkering away with first one issue and then the next. Of course, any delay in publishing ultimately cuts into the lead time for getting the next issue ready, so some things may occasionally get left out.

Time is always in short supply, it seems. I suspect that many out there, both players and PBM moderators alike, know how that is. It's a struggle, sometimes, to get everything done. Covering every game and every company in all of PBM and ancestral descendant existence is quite the task! I invite

you, if you're reading this, to become a correspondent for your favorite sector of the PBM industry and hobby.

Even if there's not someone from every existing PBM player base willing to step up to plate on this, maybe there's a few brave souls scattered here and there that might be willing to take up the gauntlet and try your hand at the correspondent's role. No experience is required!

After all, it didn't take any experience for me to become an editor and a publisher. Granted, that lack of experience might yield less than stellar results, at times, but in case you haven't noticed, this magazine is still chugging right along. We're still publishing issues, and we're still trying to improve the

magazine with each subsequent issue.

*Suspense & Decision* still offers free advertising for game companies and game moderators. Thus, you don't have to have a big budget for



advertising, in order to send in an advertisement to us for inclusion in a future issue. What do you have to lose? Ads can be as large as 800 pixels wide by 1035 pixels high in size. Of course, smaller ads are welcome, also!

Some are not keen on the concept of free advertising, it seems, but I favor it. What do you think, though? Feel free to write in and let us know.

Have you started a new game, lately? How is your current favorite game going?

Again, write in and let us know how that game is going, as well. Why? So that we can share your

thoughts and your deeds with others, and who knows? They just might decide to give those very same games a try, also.

It will help in our efforts to grow the hobby's overall player base.

I browse the Internet a good bit, trying to scrounge for various things related to play by mail gaming. In the process of doing so, one thing that I've noticed is that most PBM company websites do not seem to provide a link to either the PlayByMail.Net website nor to download links for *Suspense &*



*Decision* magazine. If you're reading this and can see fit to do so, then we would welcome an increase in visibility for our site and our magazine on your site.

Twenty years ago, Editor David Webber of Paper Mayhem magazine was lamenting that he was hearing less and less from PBM companies. So, when PBM companies and game moderators fall silent, this is not a new challenge that the play by mail hobby faces. I encourage all GMs and PBM companies to make an extra effort to send something in for our next issue.

What is the PBM industry doing to get younger generations involved? What is your PBM company doing along the lines of designing new PBM games from scratch? Or is postal gaming worth even bothering with, anymore?

Opinions on such subjects vary, of course. Certainly, I have my own opinions on such matters. The lion's share

of the focus by companies and GMs is directed elsewhere, these days. There's gold in them thar technological hills, boys!

Looking back over the span of years since I first tried my hand at playing games via the postal service, I can't help but reflect upon the fact that PBM gaming had legitimate claim to many strengths. Compared to gaming over the Internet, postal gaming strikes me now as a more relaxed form of gaming. I could be wrong on that, but it is what I feel, nonetheless.

Flipping through some back issues of Paper Mayhem magazine, I find myself wondering more about such old PBM classics as *Jurien Range*, *A Duel Of A Different Color*, and *The Land Of Kharrus*. These and countless other PBM gems have faded from the gaming scene. Lots of games, lots of different PBM companies. Much has faded by the wayside. There's probably no way to

account for all that's been lost, down through the years.

Maybe younger generations will never come to know the pleasure of playing games by mail. Or perhaps with the passage of more time than has yet transpired, there will be those that rediscover this beloved medium of gaming pleasure.

If anyone out there knows how many issues that older PBM magazines published, then be sure to let me know. *Suspense & Decision* is coming up on Issue #17 (even though one issue was lost to time and circumstance), and with every issue, I find myself where this magazine is heading.

Probably not where some might prefer, of course. Personally, I would rather have *Paper Mayhem* back. I would prefer to see *Flagship* still churning out issues. Those choices are not available to us, though.

*Won't you join us in filling the gap?*

# BACK COVER SMORGASBORD

## Feedback Questions for this Issue - Issue #16

1. Which articles/sections did you enjoy the most, and why?
2. What is your favorite board game that you are enjoying, currently, and what about it retains your interest?
3. What has been the most exciting thing that has happened in a PBM game to you, of late?
4. If you could ask PBM companies just one question that's on your mind of late, what would that question be?
5. What turn-based games have you tried, recently, that have exceeded your expectations?

## CHECKLIST FOR NEXT ISSUE

- If a player, write an article or game review and [send it in](#).
- If a GM or Game Company, [send in](#) news, events, happenings, and advertisements about your company or games.
- Log on to Facebook and click the "Like" button on the [PlayByMail.Net Facebook page](#).
- Tell other gamers that you know about play by mail gaming and Suspense & Decision magazine.
- Join a new game.

## DEADLINES FOR NEXT ISSUE

**Deadline for Submissions: March 20th, 2017**

**Publication Deadline: April 1st, 2017**

**SEND ALL INQUIRIES & SUBMISSIONS TO**

**[PlayByMail.Net@gmail.com](mailto:PlayByMail.Net@gmail.com)**