

Suspense & Decision

INTERGALACTIC SUSPENSE
SEALED IN AN ENVELOPE

ISSUE #17

"Help save planet Earth by reading this issue!"

SEPTEMBER 2017

**PBM BUREAU
OF
ALIEN AFFAIRS**

**DON'T LET THEM
CATCH YOU
NOT PLAYING
PBM!**

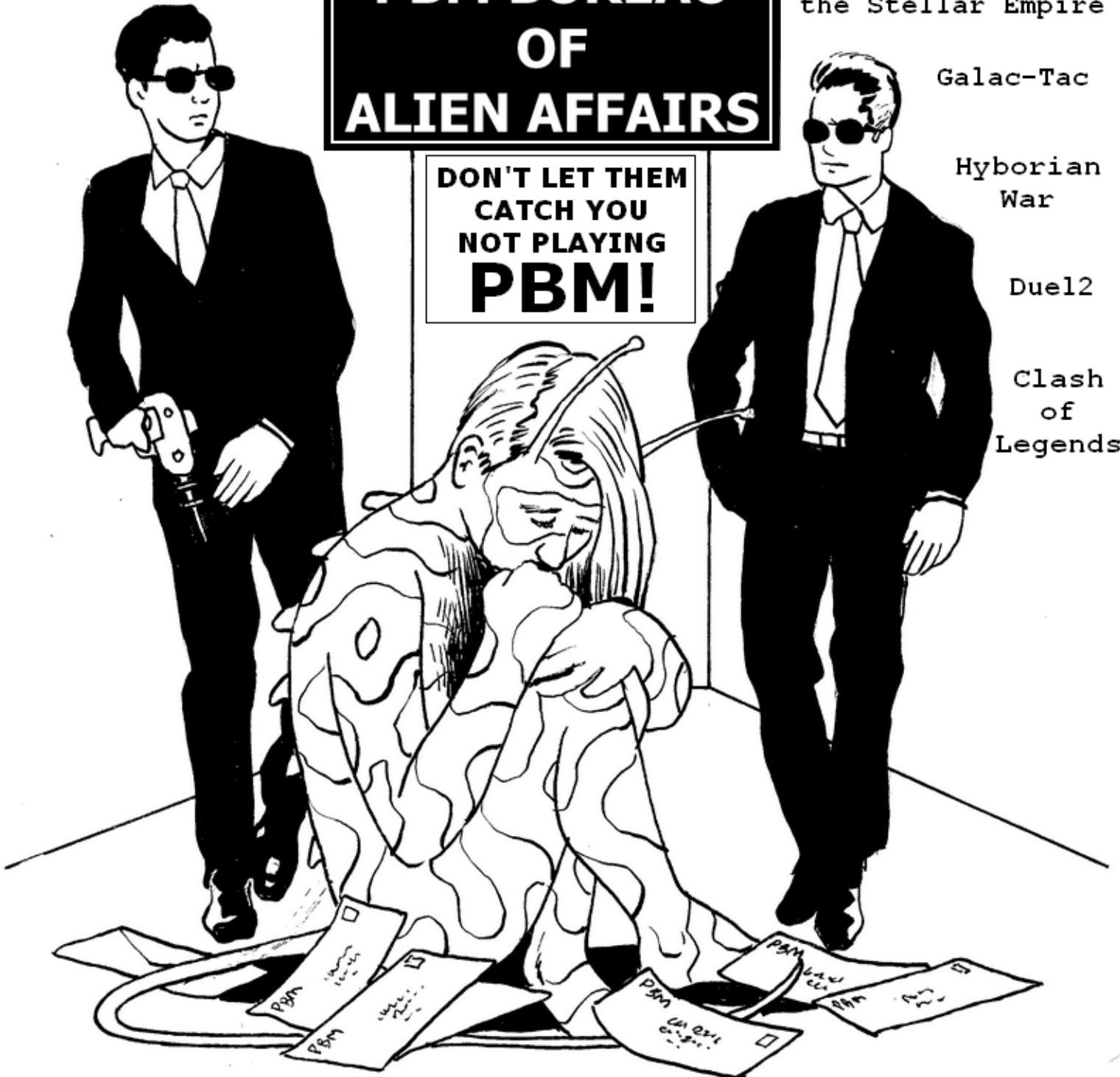
Phoenix: Beyond
the Stellar Empire

Galac-Tac

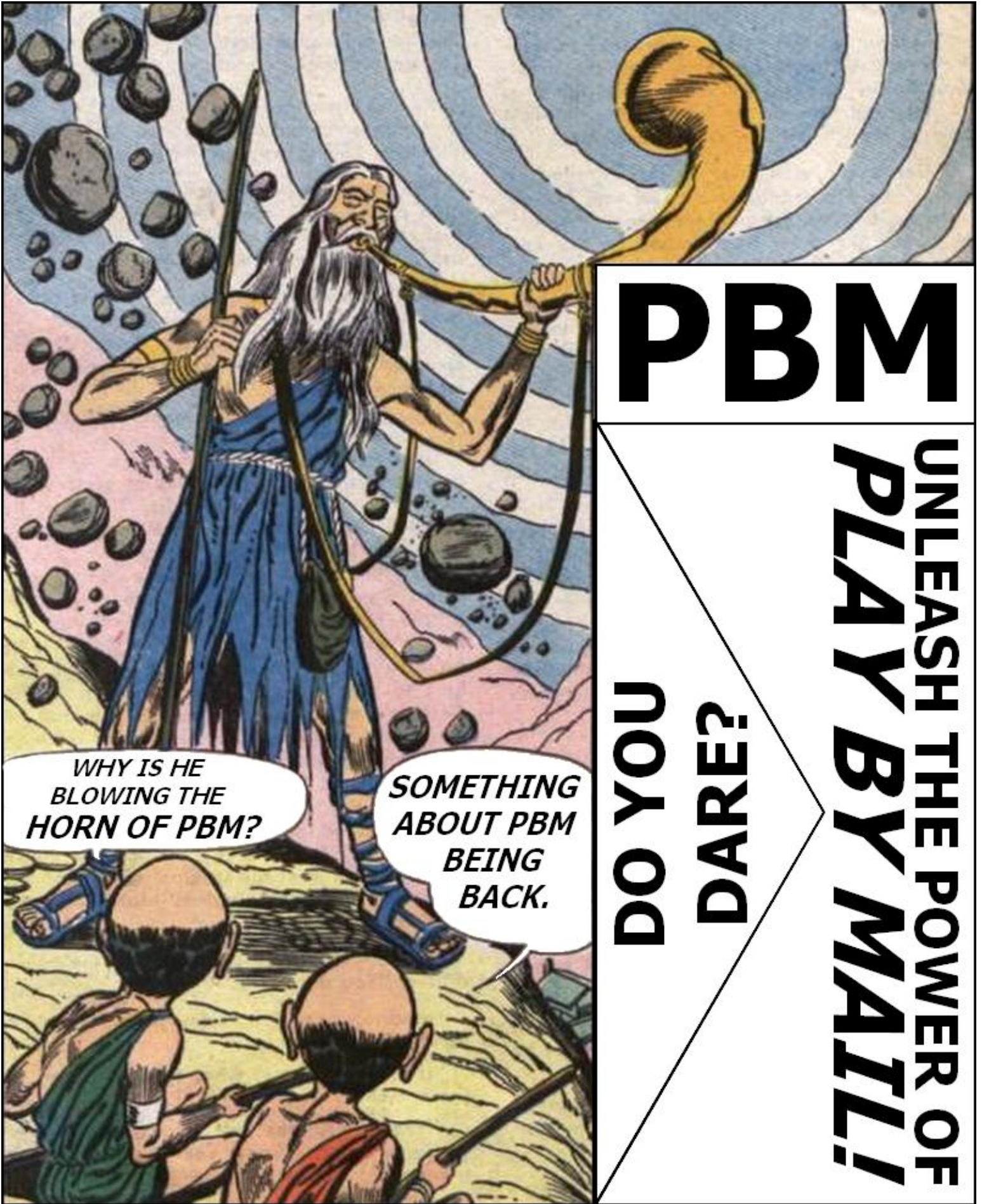
Hyborian
War

Duel2

Clash
of
Legends



They came from the 21st Century to save PBM!



WHY IS HE BLOWING THE HORN OF PBM?

SOMETHING ABOUT PBM BEING BACK.

PBM

DO YOU DARE?

**UNLEASH THE POWER OF
PLAY BY MAIL!**

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Welcome to Issue #17!

Getting this issue out the door and in your digital hands has been like lifting the Rock of Gibraltar. But, it's here, at long last. Enjoy!

Effective immediately, forthcoming issues will be subject to a hard rule of "three and one" - meaning, as soon as I have three articles in hand, I will proceed with publishing each new issue. The underlying purpose of this is to try and keep my nose to the publishing grindstone (Ouch!), and to accelerate the frequency of publication.

Granted, it will come at the sacrifice of length per issue, but for the foreseeable future, I want to focus upon re-instilling a sense of regularity in Suspense & Decision's arrival in our readership's hands in a more timely manner. For the purpose of this hard "three and one rule," I will even include articles written by myself.

So, as soon as you finish reading this issue, sit down and write me an article for our next issue, Issue #18. Between you, me, and one other person, we can meet this "three and one" rule. I know for a fact that numerous people on Facebook read the magazine, yet those articles from you social media mavens aren't exactly pouring in. Let's try to make an effort to change that. What do you say?

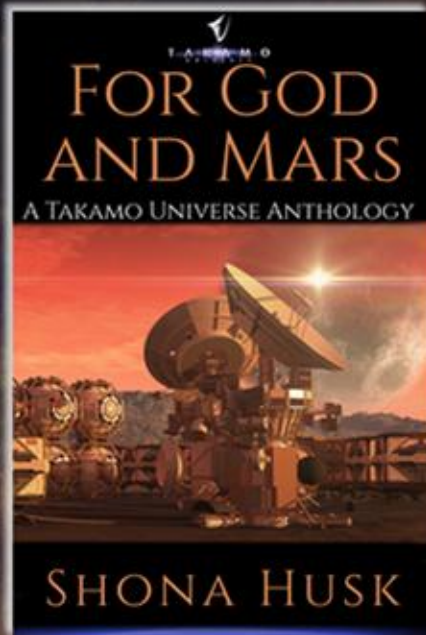
If anybody from the Flying Buffalo Gamers reads this editorial, then how about nudging Craig Delahoy, the site administrator there, to check on the status of my attempt to register there.

Facebook lurkers that I'm calling out to rise to the challenge of crafting an article include Ira Gossett, Kev Wirsing, William Feild, Jr., Jon Hughes, Brenton Hooper, David Platt, Mark Nunya, Gavin Baumber, and Walter van Vliet. Remember, people, Khazad-dûm only got built because more than just a few dwarves participated. Or put another way, it came into existence in a literary sense, because somebody bothered to actually write about it.

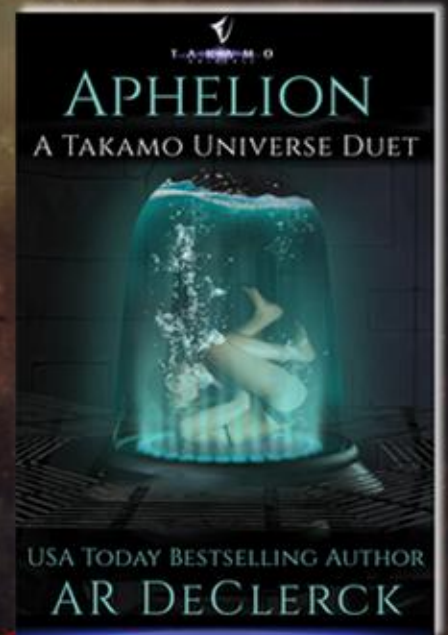
Sid Razavi has been carrying the writing load, of late, for the PhoenixBSE player community. Who, in that bunch of players, will chip an article in for the next issue or three? And what about the player communities of Hyborian War, Alamaze, Jason Oates Games, Middle-earth Games, Harlequin Games, Agema, and Rolling Thunder Games?

Charles Mosteller - Editor of Suspense & Decision magazine

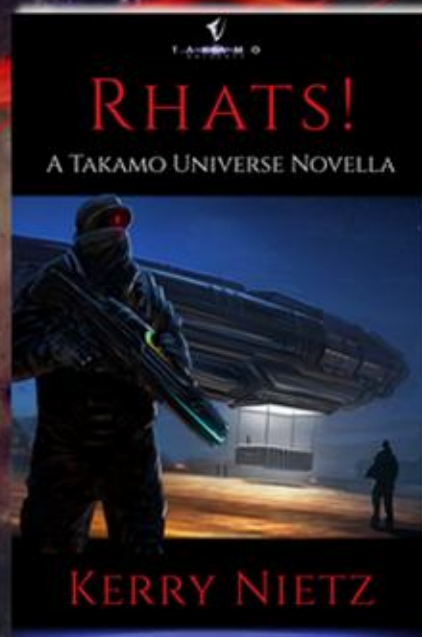
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Why I like playing Clash of Legends?

No two games are ever the same

Heitor Mancio

I've been playing, or running, PBM games since 1992. It adds up to 25 years where the technology evolved a lot. Back in the day, I would send handwritten orders and receive results printed via regular email. While I love some of the older games and Civilization is still my favorite AAA computer game, I feel a need to play a game that's evolving and getting better, not just frozen on time receiving minor improvements over the last decade or so. Clash is not frozen, for sure. If anything else, too many bugs are introduced as the new features are introduced too fast with minimum testing. But that's the deal on a free game, the players are the testers. On the other hand, some other systems introduce changes very slowly and well tested, therefore the bugs are introduced much slowly as well. So are the new features.

In the few years or so playing Clash, I saw the number of players, scenarios, improvements and everything else growing tenfold. I remember when I had to know my code and submit orders via a text file attached to an email to having a program to take care of everything and

send my orders to an automated server that always run turns on the scheduled time. They are reliable, I always hated the suspense and delays.

The key difference I see on Clash is that two games are never the same.

Remember when you played that game and looked for hints and opening in magazines? Then you could repeat that opening to ensure your victory? That's not going to work with Clash. Each game is unique. The sheer amount of permutations that each game can have is insane. No two games are ever going to be the same.

Check the list of features and imagine that each game will have a different combination of those, with different people.

I highlight the features that I love the most comparing to other PBM game systems I played before.

Unique scenarios – each scenario is a truly new experience with a completely different set of rules and mechanics not just a copy with some characters renamed and a new map. i.e. in one game the combat happens at the

Each game is unique. The sheer amount of permutations that each game can have is insane. No two games are ever going to be the same.

beginning of the turn making it easier to plan and defend. In another scenario, the combat happens as part of movement at the end of the turn, making the game much more dynamic and aggressive. Another example is that in the GoT scenario there are resources and complex economy to be managed while in WDO the economy is very simple and straight forward.

There's a number of different scenarios – and more in the making. I haven't played them all, but I will. Here's the short list: Game of Thrones (GoT); Lord of Midnight (LoM); Greek Battles (GrB); 300 of Sparta (300); War of Dwarves and Orcs (WDO)

Different variants available – Locked teams where alliances are pre-defined; Free for All where alliances are made, or broke, during the game by the players; Deathmatch where everyone is an enemy (I think Highlander here: "There can be only one"); Gun boat where you don't know who are the other players; and on top of all of it, the GMs are accommodating and I've seen them creating custom setups at player's request, even the crazy ones.

Game speed options - Games can be weekly, bi-weekly, daily, every couple of days, every 3 or 4 days, hourly (I heard that a 48 hours face to face full game happened more than once), when all players are ready. I stick to the weekly games, but I did play a game with turns every other day.

Unique troops per faction - not just a different name, but all stats may change from one troop to another, from one scenario to another. It does not help with the learning curve I have to tell you, but it does add to the uniqueness.

Troops strength changes according to terrain – very few games I played I would say that selecting where the battle takes place makes the difference between winning or losing. It takes the picking your battleground to an entire new level. Many times I have to sacrifice moving farther to engage the battle on my terms on a plain, hills or mountains because if I did not, I would lose the combat.

Variable number of starting players per game - Most scenarios have some pre-defined numbers for each variant. i.e. GoT games can have 8, 12, 13 or 20 players. But in WDO, that I only played once so far, it ranges from 2 to 37 per game.

Variable number of teams - I played Free For All games with 13 players that ended up in three alliances after a few initial turns, but I also played team games with 2 or 4 locked teams.

There is an AI behind the NPCs – the artificial intelligence keeps things interesting moving armies and challenging players. I don't think it's smart enough to beat a player, but definitely it adds to a multiplayer game to have to deal with one more variable. NPC interaction is encouraged, bringing more flavor to each game. I'm still

learning how the game AI works for NPCs. I can recruit some to be my PCs, others follow me. And when you thing you have it figured out, there's an update that improves their behavior. Or a new NPC comes up...

Custom Startup Packages – I like more the games where you can choose between startup packages. Not all games or scenarios have them, but most do. The decisions begin even before the game starts. Boost your PCs or your cities? Decide to upgrade troops or get more magic items? Decisions, decisions...

WDO has variable starting locations

–When I played WDO I could select in which hex my faction would start. I could pick from a list of valid options, which allowed me to tailor the startup for the type of game I wanted to play. Defensive on the mountains? You got it. It did not work so well for me, still overrun by my enemies. Don't play defense on WDO. Play offense, and a very aggressive one. But still, I can play the same faction at a different location each time for a different game.

I don't know how it's going to be a decade from now, but for the past few years I can say for sure that this game kept me exited and coming back for more. I constantly need to resist the urge to sign up for one more game. Three is my current limit. And every couple of months there's something new and interesting enough to keep my desire to sign up for more games at a

high level. Now I got to go prepare my orders for my three realms.



Clash of Legends



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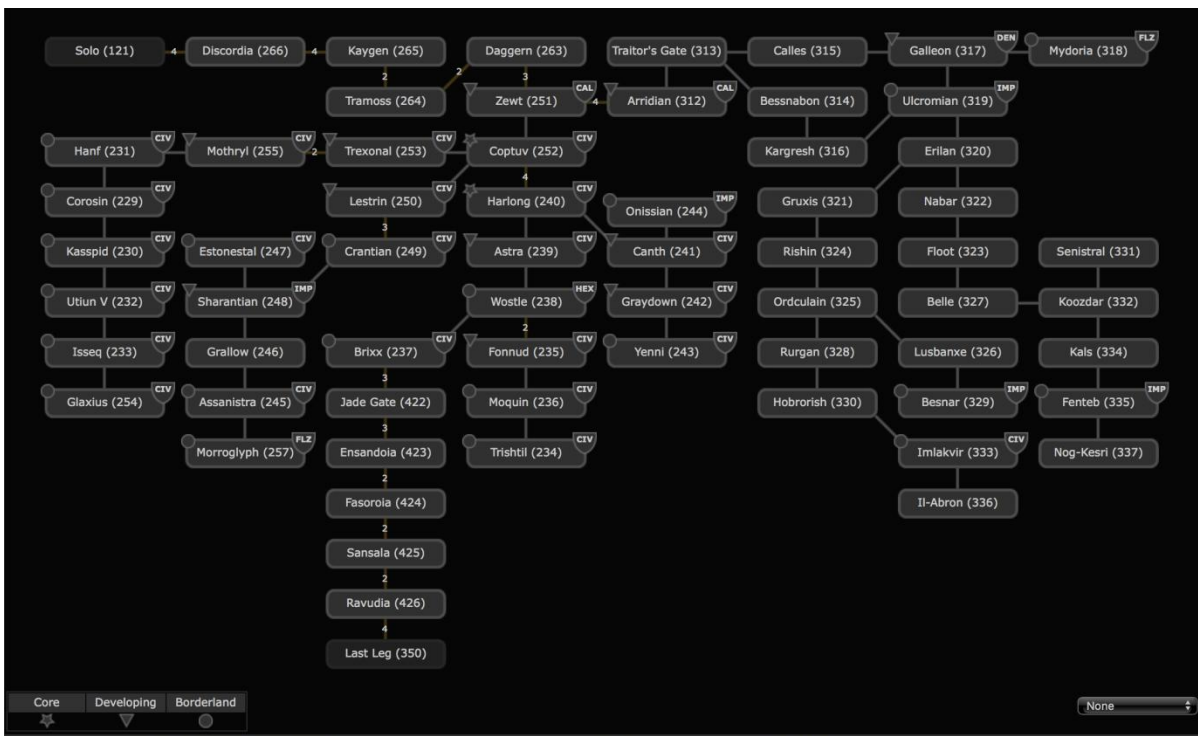
Deep Dive into Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire

Part II: An Explorer's Guide

Sid Razavi

In the previous article, I laid the foundations for this series giving you the background of *Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire* (BSE) and how it is played (see [S&D Issue 16](#)). In this article, we're going to delve into one of the rich seams of gameplay available: *Exploration*. I will cover everything you need to go exploring for minerals, unique trade goods, hidden asteroids and more.

A. The scope of Beyond the Stellar Empire



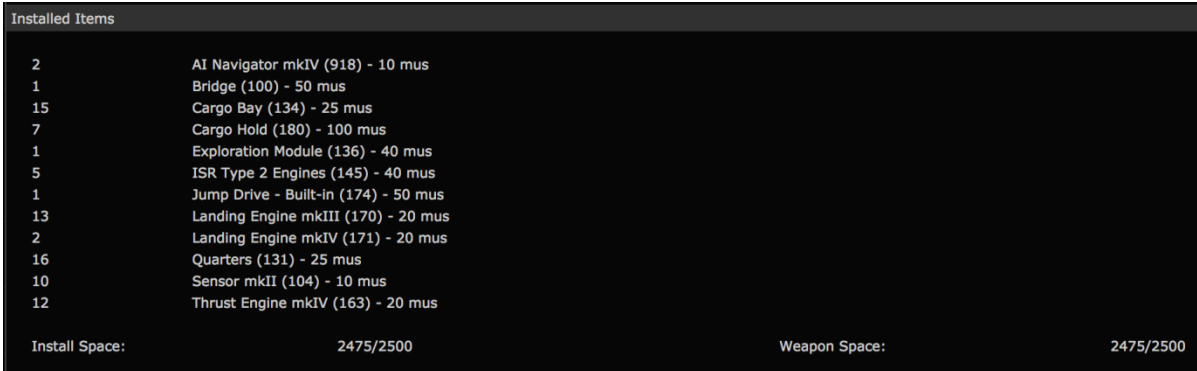
There are seventeen peripheries, each with dozens of star systems and hundreds of planets and other phenomena in the universe of Phoenix. And more are discovered all the time as players expand the universe by performing astronomical research. Vast territories of space are unclaimed by any faction and even the regions where players have long been established, opportunities for exploration still exist.

It is a mind-boggling vast and detailed environment. Each planet may hold numerous

hidden deposits of ores, a variety of terrain to explore and hundreds of unique trade goods to be discovered. Then there are the strange and wonderful surprises that you might come to expect from a science-fiction space opera: *strange aliens, dangerous relics and malevolent machines*.

Phoenix exploration is so uniquely enjoyable partly due to the GM's background in astrophysics and his understanding of how geology, ecology and other natural systems work. Even the fantastical has its roots in the best of speculative fiction, extrapolated from plausible scientific conjecture. Well, for the most part – there's also the BSE legacy of comic book futurism (think *Flash Gordon*) where the aliens are all too human, with a slice of Earth-like biology and culture thrown in. This can be fun even if a little jarring alongside the hard science fiction feel of the modern layers of the game.

B. What you will need



Installed Items	
2	AI Navigator mkIV (918) - 10 mus
1	Bridge (100) - 50 mus
15	Cargo Bay (134) - 25 mus
7	Cargo Hold (180) - 100 mus
1	Exploration Module (136) - 40 mus
5	ISR Type 2 Engines (145) - 40 mus
1	Jump Drive - Built-in (174) - 50 mus
13	Landing Engine mkIII (170) - 20 mus
2	Landing Engine mkIV (171) - 20 mus
16	Quarters (131) - 25 mus
10	Sensor mkII (104) - 10 mus
12	Thrust Engine mkIV (163) - 20 mus
Install Space: 2475/2500	
Weapon Space: 2475/2500	

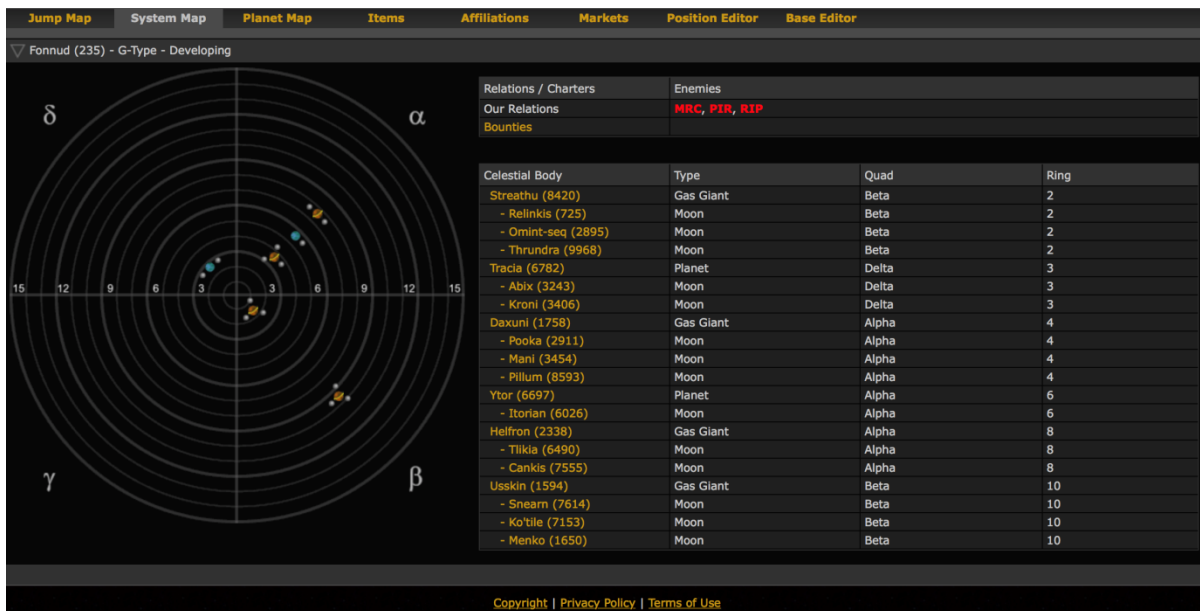
You start the game with a starship that is ready to go exploring and you can get more from the introductory missions as well. Your affiliation may also be able to help you out. Ground parties and platforms can do some of the exploration work too.

If you want to find out how you go exploring with your starter ships, feel free to skip this section and go to the next section called 'Eyes for the stars'. You can always come back to this when you start thinking about upgrading your ship or getting more ships.

For those of you still with me, I will discuss what components in a starship are useful for exploration. You may already have access to the resources to modify your starships to take full advantage of the range of options available.

For me, exploration ships are the most personalised of my positions; usually earning their character through long and interesting histories.

Sensors



The most essential function that your exploration ship will provide, beyond the ability to move around the stars, is *scanning*. This is where your ship detects celestial bodies like planets and moons as well as other positions like starships and starbases.

Sensors installed in your starship contribute **sensor factors** which help determine the starship's **sensor rating**, given as a percentage with no upper limit.

Adding more sensors has a diminishing effect on the sensor rating. Better sensors (higher mark items) contribute more sensor factors which means for the same amount of space used in your starship, you will get a higher sensor rating.

Besides the line of normal *sensors* (marks I through to IV) there are more specialised *survey sensors* which have double the sensor factors when searching for minerals, as compared to the equivalent mark basic sensor. If you are searching for minerals with your ship and want to maximise your chances of finding very rare ores, then you might consider sourcing some survey sensors.

The obvious question is what you should be aiming towards in terms of sensor rating. Your sensor rating is going to affect the accuracy of your efforts to locate the best place to tap into an ore deposit but you can generally work around this by being thorough, throwing more ships at the problem and narrowing down scans to specific sectors.

If finding minerals is your goal I think 60% plus sensor rating is going to be just fine for most purposes. You can achieve that with just 10 mark II sensors. If you can do better, by installing more sensors or getting better versions of sensors, then do. I personally wouldn't sacrifice too much space for sensors in a general-purpose exploration vessel, at least not at the cost of making my ships any slower or not being able to take some other useful equipment like exploration modules or cargo bays.

However, if you're looking for asteroids in the deepest edges of a star system, you're going to have to aim much higher. At a minimum, a 100% sensor rating is recommended for asteroid hunting.

All that said, there's no type of exploration your starter ship can't perform if it devotes sufficient time-units (TUs) to the effort. It's just that better sensors will improve your chances of finding things that are harder to find.

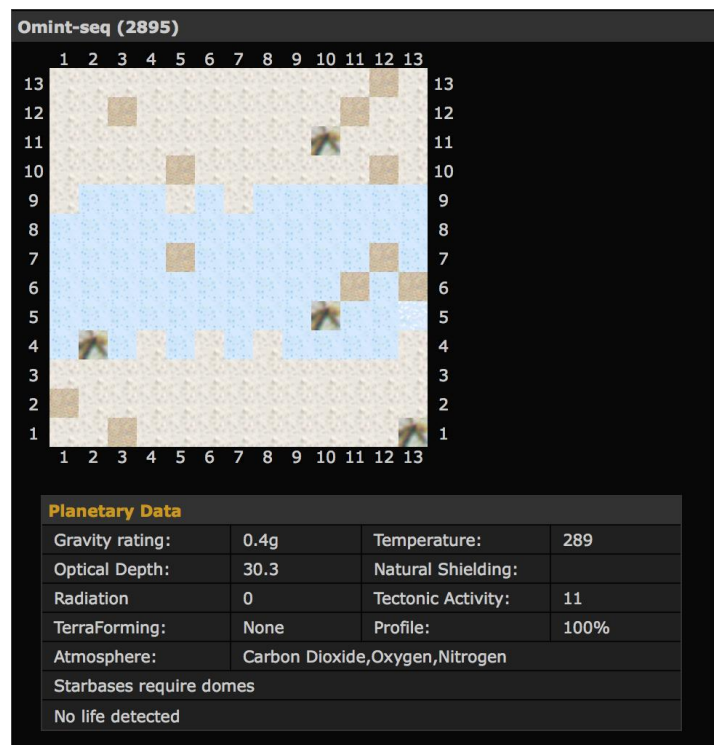
Engines

If you want to explore more than just one planet, you're going to need some engines to propel your ship. If you've signed up and followed the basic missions you've already done some space movement and seen the various orders that do this. There are some special considerations when exploring so I'll briefly cover the different types of engines and why you might want to use them.

Space travel is performed in one of three ways: thrust movement, inter-planetary movement and inter-stellar movement.

Thrust movement is a function of the **thrust power** provided by your engines

versus the total mass of your starship's hulls, armour and installed items (but not its cargo) which is used to determine its **manoeuvre speed**. *Thrust engines* (again in various technology marks from I to IV) are the standard way of providing thrust power to your ship. Specialist engines called *Landing Engines* are also useful for exploration ships. As the name implies, they are better at landing and taking-off from planetary surfaces. The downside is they are worse than thrust engines in combat situations.



Each planet has a gravity rating, and if your ship's manoeuvre speed is less than this, your ship won't be able to land or take off from the planet without some help. Therefore, Landing Engines are particularly useful for getting your ship to explore high-gravity worlds. I'd aim for a manoeuvre speed of at least 4gs on exploration ships that are going to be landing on planets and 5gs would cover even the highest gravity worlds.

Inter-planetary movement is done via ISR (Inverse Spatial Resonance) *drives* which come in four varieties with the type 1s being bigger and quicker and the type 4s being the smallest and slowest. ISR drives allow your ship to make a series of short jumps, folding space, to get from point A to point B within a star system but not in orbit or on the surface of planets. There are restrictions on the type of ISR drive that ships of different hulls may use, but for exploration ships, you want ISR type 2 drives which are more optimised for speed.

Inter-stellar movement is done via jump engines. There are several different types that broadly fall into the categories of slow (i.e. *Jump Drives, Armoured Jump Drives*), very slow (i.e. *Backup Jump Drives*) and quick (e.g. *Inbuilt Jump Drives, Quantum Jump Drives, Hyperdrives* and *Antimatter Drives*).

You probably want the fastest jump engines you can get, but there are good reasons to take slower ones in some circumstances. This usually comes down to the size and hull type of the ship or if you're going into regions of space that are hazardous to your engines. The starter ships you get all have Inbuilt Jump Engines which are perfect for the job at hand. You may want to supplement them with another jump engine in case they are destroyed due to some weird and rare stellar phenomena or a light collision with an asteroid belt.

Exploration Module

The exploration module is a bit of kit that will help you do prospecting, and may be useful in special action exploration. It, too, has higher mark versions available. I don't see the point of these myself, as in my experience, they are only useful for prospecting, which I think is a silly way to spend your time.

Officers and Crew

Your ship needs to be crewed, but an officer is usually optional. For exploration, you want an officer at the helm, which you can get by promoting one of your crew using the *Create Officer* political order, costing 1,000 stellars.

Officers gain experience from performing mundane tasks and from combat, the latter of which you probably want to avoid with your unarmed exploration ships. When officers have some experience points available, they can be trained. There are several useful skills for those captaining exploration ships.

The first obvious candidate is the *Exploration skill*, which will help with prospecting and special action exploration. Other useful skills are *Sensors* (which improves the sensor power of your ship's sensors), *GPI* (which improves the sensor power when searching for minerals), *Navigation* (which improves your ship's manoeuvre speed) and *Jumping* (which reduces the time it takes to move between star systems).

A well-trained officer can make your ship more effective overall, as well as being the difference between success and failure in certain circumstances. Invest your time and stellars in training your officers.

Other Specialist Equipment

Phoenix has a range of other items that are particularly useful for the explorer. You don't need them for most exploration activities, but as you delve deeper, you may want to see if you can source some of these from your affiliation, other players, or perhaps even produce your own.

Orbital probes are a way of performing scans of planets without going into orbit with your ship. This can make scanning a whole system quicker, and potentially safer from the outer edges. Probes are expended on use, and live in your cargo bay.

Survey rigs are used when doing deep core scans of mineral deposits. Once again, these are expendable, and live in the cargo bay of your ship.

There are also a variety of *ship bays* that can be fitted to your ship that allow you to directly mine ore deposits, exploit resources, allow other ships to dock and maintain without having to build outposts. Perfect for when you're far from a friendly starbase, or if you spot some ore or resource deposit that you want to tap straight away. However, these are big, expensive, and difficult to produce.

C. Eyes for the stars

Your ship is ready and you're hungry to see the universe, meet interesting new life forms, and exploit them as resources. *Where to go?* This is usually influenced by your affiliation, which will have regions of space that it has access to, including private

systems that may only be available to its members.

There is also the vast new Peripheries, like the Coreward Arm and Orion Spur, that are free-for-all. If you're still a Trainee, your choice will be limited to the Halo periphery. This is a good place to learn and even set up outposts, but be warned, it is completely devoid of the very rare minerals that are essential for advanced items. On the plus side, this fact makes it less competitive, and there are other restrictions that makes finding and exploiting unique trade goods more open. It's a good place to explore, if you want to build an income for the future.

```
>TU 291: Scan System
System Academy (777):
Periphery: None
Jump Ring: 10
Star Type: G-Type
Radiation: 0
Celestial Bodies:
Planet Inferno (3785) {Alpha, 1}
Planet Waterworld (5776) {Beta, 5}
Moon Rocks (9359) {Beta, 5}
Gas Giant Cloudy (3510) {Delta, 5}
Moon Muddy (5681) {Delta, 5}
Moon Foggy (4142) {Delta, 5}
Planet Garden (9083) {Alpha, 7}
Moon Safari (4774) {Alpha, 7}
Planet Gravity (7973) {Gamma,11}
Moon Flat (5405) {Gamma,11}
Moon Plains (5) {Gamma,11}
Planet Iceberg (8808) {Delta, 15}

System Message:
This is the archetypal star system with no special features. As could be expected, the minimal distance from the sun for a safe jump to another system is ring 10. Habitable worlds are usually found between rings 3 and 7 of a system (there are exceptions, of course). Closer to the sun planets tend to be too hot to bear life, while planets in the outer rings are so far away from the warming sun that they can be expected to be cold, lifeless rocks.

Links:
Trainee (888) (1 jump)
Newbian (999) (1 jump)
Total TU cost for this action is 17
```

It's always a good idea to speak to your affiliates before embarking on any journey, as they will be best placed to advise you of the potential risks and opportunities. Additionally, many affiliations share their past exploration results via their private libraries on the Nexus website, so you aren't treading over old ground.

```
>TU 226: Scan Planetary Population
Sentient Life:
22% Naplian
78% Kastorian
Population: 15914000
Total TU cost for this action is 42

>TU 184: Scan Planetary Economy
You scanned the infrastructure of Garden (9083) from orbit
Infrastructure Development - Stage 3
Capital Base: Not established
Government: Kastorian Province
Current technology integrated into world infrastructure:
Basic Colonisation Support
Industry
Administration
Health
Advanced Colonisation Support
Infrastructure Development

You scanned the economy of Garden (9083) from orbit

Trade Values
-----
Trade Goods      Max Income      Value/Mu      Low Val      High Val
Drugs            167496          1.2            4.8           9.6
Lifefarms       15967           0.8            3.2           6.4
Lifefarms       38903           1.14           4.58          9.16

Merchandising
-----
Maximum
Local           450
Global          150
Drop/10 Complexes
-----
Local           31
Global           3

Total TU cost for this action is 85
```

Once you know where you're going, it's just a matter of getting your ship to the star system of interest and doing some scans.

Passive Scans

Whenever your ship moves and even when it is stationary, its sensors will tell you about other positions or planets it can detect. This is called *passive scanning*. Your chance of spotting something is dependent on your sensor rating and the other position's **profile rating**, which may be a large positive or negative percentage. The smaller the profile rating, the harder it is for it to be detected. It's worth keeping that in mind about your own ships, if wandering into places that may be dangerous.

```
>TU 274: Move to planet orbit {777} {9083}
Move to Gamma 9
Move to Gamma 8
Move to Gamma 7
Move to Beta 7
Move to Alpha 7
[-Planet Garden (9083) [0.6g]
[-Moon Safari (4774) [0.8g]
Entering orbit of Garden (9083)
$5000 weekly starbase tax offset by support towards civilian system claim.
Scanned:
CIV STARBASE JANUS (450) - {-1-} 4566 kMus - Hiport
Total TU cost for this action is 31
```

```
>TU 243: Scan Planet
You scanned Garden (9083) from orbit
Planet Map of Garden (9083)

1
12345678901234567
15SSTTTTTTSSSSSSSS 15
14SsGGSSFFSFSSSSSSS 14
13GGFFFSFJFJFSSSSSS 13
12FFGFSFJFJFSSGGG 12
11FFFSFSPSJPSSSSGG 11
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9 SSSFSSSUSSSSSSSS 9
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6 GGFSGFGFMMSsFSS 6
5 GGFSGFGFMMSsFSS 5
4 GGGSFFMMMSsSSSS 4
3 SsGSsFSSSSSSGG 3
2 sFFFSFFSSSSSSSS 2
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Key:
F - Forest
S - Sea
M - Mountains
G - Grasslands
U - Urban
C - Cultivated
T - Tundra
s - Shallows
J - Jungle
ISR Field: Stable

Gravity rating: 0.6g
Optical Depth: 21.8
Radiation: 0
Terraforming: 0
Sensor Profiles: 100%
Atmosphere: Oxygen, Inert Elements, Nitrogen
Starbases must be enclosed (domes required).
There is a sentient population.
Total TU cost for this action is 17
```

Scanning Planets

Once you're in orbit of a planet, moon or asteroid (hereafter referred to collectively as planets) that interests you, it's time to perform one of several types of active scans.

The *Scan Planet* order is useful for getting a map and other details about a planet, but the available data on the planet's information screen on the Nexus website already contains most of the relevant information. If you're in a hurry, you may wish to skip this.

The more useful scan orders are used to determine potential mineral deposits (which I'll cover in the next section), and for worlds with a sentient population, the *Scan Planetary Population* and *Scan Planetary Economy* orders let you know the make-up of the people and the economy of the planet. An essential part of deciding whether you want to build a starbase on that planet.

Whilst in orbit, there are some other exploration activities you can do, which are covered in the 'Exploring with Special Actions' section.

D. Digging for ores

One of the key objectives of exploration is to find out whether a planet contains

something worth exploiting. This falls into two broad categories: minerals and trade goods. Discovering the latter is covered in the 'Exploring with Special Actions' section.

Minerals are everything from common metals, basic elements and hydrocarbons, which are used extensively to produce items, through to increasingly rarer and more exotic minerals used in more advanced technologies.

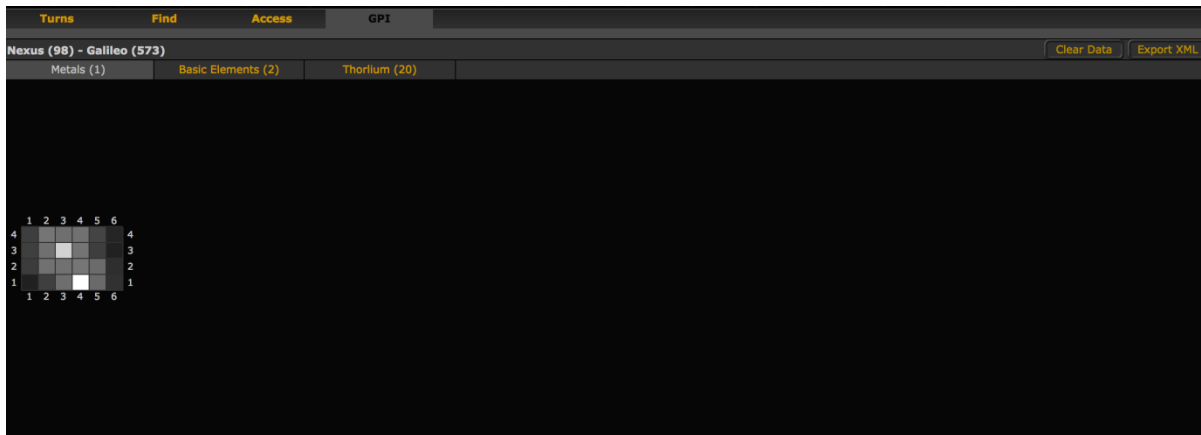
Geological Probability Indicators (GPI)

To discover the minerals hidden beneath the surface of a planet, spaceships use sensors and a statistical technique to determine likely deposits. This is done at several layers of granularity, starting with the *GPI Planet* order, which gives you the average and variance of the yields of ore deposits across the whole planet. The accuracy of this information is dependent on your ship's sensor rating, with survey sensors doubly effective for this task. There may be some exotic minerals that you and your affiliation don't know about at all; these won't show up in GPI scans, until you discover them through special actions.

```
>TU 99:          GPI Planet {0}
Scanning for all ores:
Metals (1)              Yield = 26.2 +- 3.95
Basic Elements (2)     Yield = 39.41 +- 3.95
Hydrocarbons (3)      Yield = 26.91 +- 3.95
Pulac (21)             Yield = 5.75 +- 3.95
Total TU cost for this action is 68
```

Once you have an idea of the kind of ores you might expect to find on a planet, you can decide to do more detailed GPI work to find the peaks which are worth prospecting, or if you're lazy like me, get to building outposts.

It is possible to use the *GPI Area* order to get information on the likely yields of ores in a square block of sectors on the planet's surface. That would give you the opportunity to narrow your search down further, by performing *GPI Row* orders which will go through each sector individually in a horizontal range. Personally, I don't bother with GPIing block areas and just GPI all the rows of the planet I'm interested in which is more thorough. This is time-consuming, though, and if you're in a rush, the area-then-rows approach is quicker at finding some deposits to mine.



Once you've got your GPI results in your ship's turns, you can turn that data into a nice map using the GPI screen on the Nexus. This parses your turn results for you, and builds a cohesive picture of the highs and lows of the yields for each mineral discovered. The additional benefit of this tool is that you can share your results with your affiliates.

Prospecting

GPI results will paint a picture that shows the likely peak points that are going to be the best place to mine. To get the full picture, you can land and investigate further using the *Prospect* order. This will give you the deposit identifier, as well as the true yield and size of the ore deposit. If you've not at the optimal place for mining, the prospecting result will tell you.

Again, being a bit lazy and having already committed to GPIing the entire planet, I skip this and just build an outpost on the places I think are going to be the best, based on the GPI results alone. Prospecting is too time consuming for my tastes, and finding the modules to build an outpost relatively easy in most circumstances. For similar reasons, I don't use mining bays on ships, but if you do, then you will need to prospect to get the deposit details.

Advanced Digging: Deep Core Scans

```
>TU 200:          Deep Core Scan
                  Scanning Garden (9083) for likely deep core results.
                  Using best equipment and a skilled officer: Possible -> Good deposits
                  Using basic equipment and no officer: No Sites -> Possible deposits
                  Total TU cost for this action is 20
```

Many planets have sub-deposits that are deeper than the ore deposits discovered just below the surface. You can see if a planet is worth deep core mining by using the *Deep Core Scan*

order.

Once you have the details of a deposit, either via prospecting or by having built an outpost on the sector, you can use the *Deep Core Deposit* order to find sub-deposits. To do this, you will need to be landed and use a survey rig which is consumed. Higher mark rigs have a better a chance of discovering better sub-deposits.

Deep Core mining is only worth doing when you've already committed yourself to mining a planet. It requires expending additional resources (structural modules), and having the mines spend time digging to get to the sub-deposits. before they are productively extracting the minerals in question. Whether that's worth the effort is situational.

E. Searching for asteroids and anomalies

Star systems when discovered or made public knowledge come with information about the large and well-known planets, as well as possible hazards such as asteroid belts and nebula. However, space is big, and there are many rocks and strange things hidden away, especially in the outer edges of a star system.

Asteroids are usually just one surface sector big, and often boring. However, sometimes they're the most interesting places in the galaxy: the hiding spots of the ancient and strange. The fact they are hidden can also be appealing for sneaky stuff. There is also the chance they may contain valuable minerals or unique trade goods. Discovering them can be quite fun and rewarding.

The Right Ship

To find hidden things in the vastness of space, you will need the right sort of ship (see above about sensors and engines). This ship will often spend weeks and months systemically scanning a star system's quads. It might, therefore, come under the gaze of nefarious pirates or hostile affiliations. It's worth considering how the ship will be defended, as well as how well it can perform the job of finding undiscovered objects. The choices here are vast, but personally, I like to pack my asteroid hunters with marines, and give them a reasonable chance of withstanding raiders. In a subsequent article, I will dive into the combat side of the game.

Scanning Quads

Assuming you have a ship that you're happy to send on long term duty looking for asteroids and the like, you will want to give it orders to move to one end quad of the star system, and spend time using the *Scan Location* order. This effectively has your

ship run sensors and move around within the quad for however many TUs you decide to devote to the task, before moving on to the next quad.

The ISR rating of your engines and the TUs used determine how many 'passes' it performs, when doing a *Scan Location*. Each pass gives you a chance to detect previously hidden things, such as asteroids or other positions. Quads in star systems are bigger the further away from the system's centre they are, and so the chances of detecting something gets progressively worse, and the number of passes you can do in a set time, fewer.

There's no way of knowing whether you failed to find something, or whether there was nothing there to find. The best you can do is to make sure you've given your ship the best chance to find what there is to find, by installing the best ISR drives and having the highest sensor rating possible, plus devoting as much time as you are willing.

F. Exploring with Special Actions

So far, we've looked at ways to explore using the standard orders available. In this final section, I'm going to guide you through the more open ended type of exploration available via Special Actions, which are moderated by the GM. These types of actions have a real-world cost associated with them. They are, in my opinion, one of the most rewarding aspects of Phoenix, and lead to some of the most memorable experiences in PBM gaming.

Special actions are given as free-form texts describing what you want your ship to do. Whilst you can let your imagination run wild, there are some common forms that are used in the exploration process.



Exploring Planets from Orbit

```

>TU 300:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Perform an orbital scan
Result:
Orbital Scan/Garden
Scans reveal that the orbit of this world is very well travelled by visiting starships, presumably on account of the resident starbase. A number of small modern satellites orbit the planet and from the unencrypted transmissions being sent to and fro appear to be in use by the starbase here for media and weather related purposes. The crew scan the debris of a survey vessel in orbit which is in the process of being cleared up by shuttle crews from the starbase below; the captain makes a mental note to check the integrity of the ship on a more regular basis from now on. Other than this the normal ions and dust found in most orbits is picked up and a scan of the magnetic fields reveals nothing out of the ordinary.

Total TU cost for this action is 72

>TU 228:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Perform a low pass scan
Result:
Low Pass Scan/Garden
A huge ocean covers a large proportion of this world which is only broken up by a large landmass that stretches from north to south. A number of smaller islands are present although these, for the most part, are only separated from the mainland by small stretches of clear blue water. There would clearly be far less land present if it were not for large bodies of water being locked into icecaps at the northern and southern polar areas of the world. The landmass itself is covered in dense forests in the temperate north and south with jungle covering the equatorial region. Sensor readings are nearly off the charts with lifeforms being detected in both the oceanic and landlocked areas of the world. There are signs of intelligent life here also across the forested areas of the temperate north and south and whilst signs of modern cities and industry are not detected as such there are obvious concentrations of large scale habitation towards the edges of the coasts and great lakes. Clearly this world appears to be rich in resources and it becomes obvious why a starbase governor would want to base a large scale operation here.

Total TU cost for this action is 72

>TU 156:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Perform a subsurface scan from orbit
Result:
Investigation/Garden/Subsurface Scan
The core of the world is still outputting sufficient energy to mobilise the crust although at present there are no major orogenic events occurring and activity along plate boundaries is minimal. Most of the crust is formed from sedimentary accumulation with the sea sectors having the only major regions of igneous layers.

Total TU cost for this action is 72

```

The first three commonly used exploration related special actions are performed whilst your ship is orbiting a planet.

1. "*Perform an orbital scan*" – to detect anything interesting and unusual in orbit of the planet
2. "*Perform a low pass scan*" – to detect anything on the surface that may be anomalous or interesting
3. "*Perform a sub-surface scan*" – to detect anything interesting below the surface of the planet

I routinely perform these actions on planets that look particularly interesting, or within systems where my interests are such that I want to explore them in detail.

Exploring Different Terrain

```

>TU 300:      Surface Exploration {...} {...}
Action:
Surface Exploration (Forest)
Result:
Surface Exploration/Garden/Forest
The low gravity of the world has allowed the local mega flora to reach a significant size. The largest of these tree analogues is over one hundred and twenty metres tall and has a canopy footprint covering five square kilometres. The canopy begins at an average height of fifty metres which makes the lower forest quite open but due to the depth of the canopy there is very little light. Ground cover is sparse and limited to a few species of ferns and some fungi. Most of the fauna seen is either avian or arboreal.

Total TU cost for this action is 50

```

Each terrain type on a planet will yield different results from the *Surface Exploration* order, which is a specialised type of special action. It is moderated by the GM, but it is so commonly used, that it has its own order.

```

>TU 250:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Perform a sub-surface scan of this sector
Result:
Investigation/Garden/Forest/Subsurface Scan
Below the thick soil layer is a sequence of limestone layers which have been heavily eroded by hydraulic action leaving a network of caves and tunnels. Long stretches of this system are flooded and the gradual flow of water creates secondary sediment deposits. Analysis of material within the deposits finds minerals suitable for exploitation as Precious Metals. Drier stretches of the caves are home to a few insect species.

Resource ID: 54794
Product: 28 Precious Metals (25)
10 % Drop: 9 Complexes
Quantity: 68320
Global resource.

```

Additionally, it's worth doing a special action to "*Perform a sub-surface scan*" whilst landed on different terrain types to see the features below the surface. Often, this will give you some resource deposit, usually of some mineral.

Investigations

Once you get the results back from the above actions, there may be follow up investigations to be performed or further research required.

What you decide to follow up on is up to you, and not everything reported in the orbital or surface exploration warrants a follow up. The way I decide is basically by picking out nouns within the results; descriptions of what appear to be interesting or novel processes and effects. For example, if a type of plant or animal is mentioned, I would do an investigation of that object. Or if the results mention unusual energy levels or atmospheric turbulence, I would do a follow up. If I meet some alien life form, it's usually worth a follow up to say hello, or look for possible trading opportunities.

```

>TU 295:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Follow up on Surface Exploration/Garden/Forest:
Investigate the trees
Result:
Investigation/Garden/Forest/Trees
These huge organisms can reach heights of around one hundred and twenty metres and larger branches can create a canopy footprint of over five square kilometres. Not all specimen reach such size and the most massive of the trees is generally a collective of smaller trees growing in close proximity that gradually meld into the larger example. Age of the larger trees is estimated to be somewhere around fifteen centuries whilst the smaller live for only half this age. The wood produced by the trees has excellent structural properties and can be used in the production of Rock Structural Modules.

Resource ID: 86953
Product: 0.75 Rock Structural Module (430)
10 % Drop: 45 Complexes
Quantity: 95200
Global resource.

Total TU cost for this action is 75

>TU 220:      Special Action {...} {...}
Action:
Follow up on Surface Exploration/Garden/Forest:
Investigate the avian fauna
Result:
Investigation/Garden/Forest/Avians
The avians are predatory creatures that are agile fliers capable of high speed manoeuvres. Wingspan of the avians is around two metres but the shape of the wing makes extended or long distance journeys quite inefficient despite the low gravity of the world. Examination of the creatures finds them to be quite timid even though they are predators. They are not edible and produce no compounds of value. It's possible that they can be used for management of small agricultural pests on low gravity worlds. The avians can be exploited as Sentinel Hawks.

Resource ID: 46122
Product: 28 Sentinel Hawks (35397)
10 % Drop: 19 Complexes
Quantity: 26300
Weekly Change: 980
Global resource.

Total TU cost for this action is 75

```

Sometimes, investigations lead nowhere. Sometimes they provide a resource deposit which can be exploited via outposts or a ship's resource bays. Occasionally, further

progress is contingent on delivery of items or the presence of a piece of technology at an outpost on the planet's surface.

The material reward for investigations tends to be greatest, if a resource is discovered upon first investigation, or sometimes, if some investment of items or technology has gone in to unlock the resource. However, sometimes long chains of investigations lead to the most remarkable discoveries and there are great mysteries and puzzles in the game that take considerable effort to unlock.

Regardless of where investigations lead, you will find the depth (and sometimes dark humour), rewarding bits of fiction to read, chew on, and interact with. Sharing them with your affiliates will often lead to some of the most interesting discussions. For less than the price of a coffee, they're well worth it.

One Step Beyond

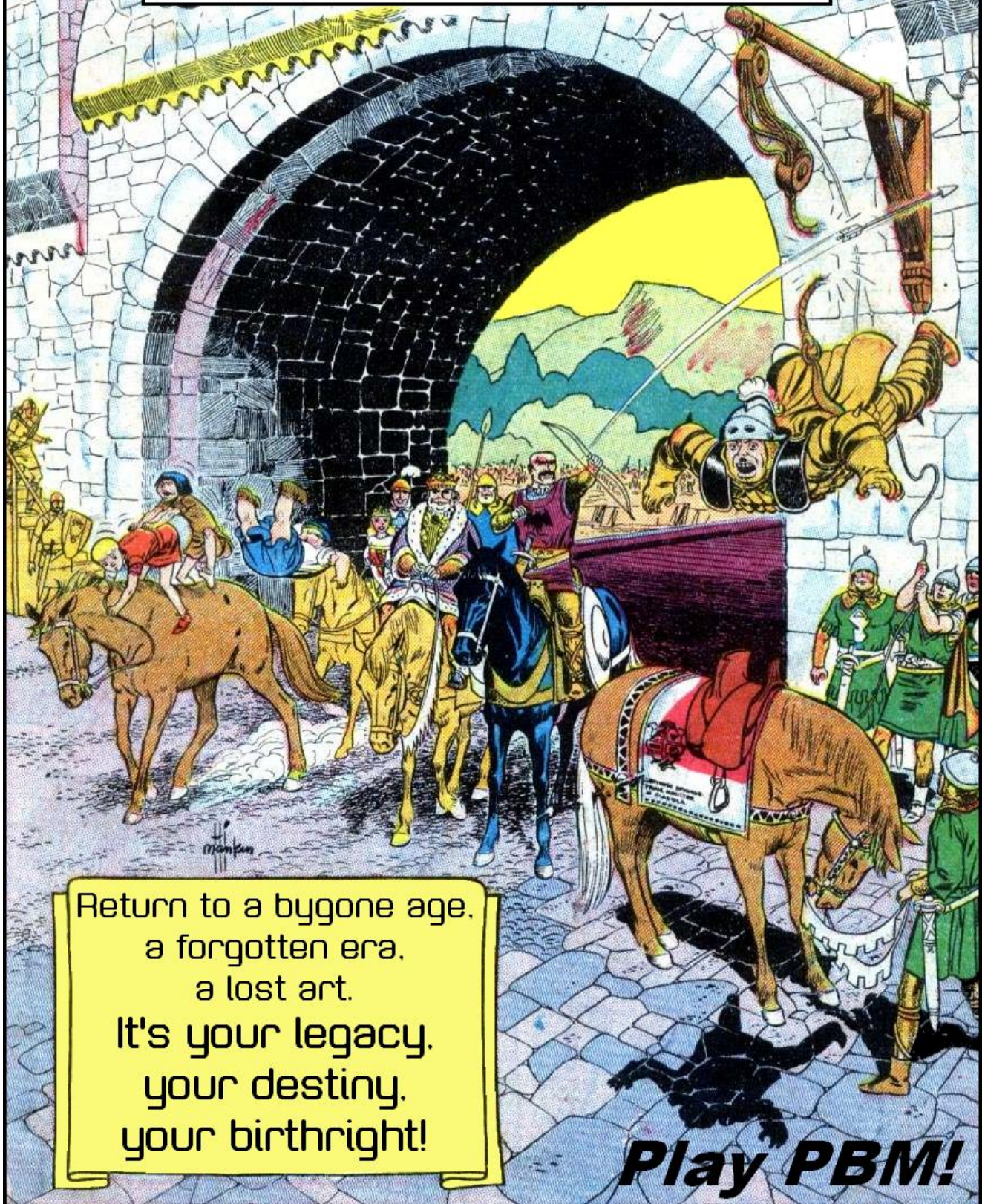
I hope you've enjoyed this nearly exhaustive look at the exploration side of *Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire*. If you're itching to get your own Surveyor class starship out there in the big black, then you might want to [sign up to play](#).

In the next article in this series, I will talk about another staple of gameplay, when I tackle trade in its many forms. I would [welcome your feedback](#) and suggestions. Until next time, happy gaming!



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Ridin' Out the Storm

A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 6

Douglas Neman

Weather Report: 3500-06

We have witnessed our first bit of warfare and almost died, today. Pardon me for being grouchy.

What did we find when we reached our next assignment? Oh, nothing much. Just the Heart of Fire homeworld!

It was a damn good thing CC put us in stealth mode.

We came out of subspace on the edge of the system, and the first thing we saw was the tail end of two armed patrol ships.

Rex saved us. He powered the ship down *immediately*. He moved even faster than he did that night he ran from the cops after egging their patrol car, which I didn't think was possible.

Even so, one of the patrol ships broke formation and began to turn.

Rex diverted power from life support to radar.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"Looking for help," he said.

Within seconds, he found an oblong asteroid about two kilometers long, only twelve kilometers away.

Rex sighed. "Without engines, it might as well be on the other side of the galaxy."

The patrol ship was now headed toward us.

I analyzed our position, speed and direction relative to the asteroid, and said, "Maybe not." I ran to the airlock and spent 30 agonizing seconds filling it with as much air as I dared, then opened the outer hatch. The air burst into space, and we shot in the other direction – toward the asteroid. Slowly.

I ran to the airlock and spent 30 agonizing seconds filling it with as much air as I dared, then opened the outer hatch. The air burst into space, and we shot in the other direction – toward the asteroid. Slowly.

With Rex making calculations and telling me when to do it, I repeated the trick twice. We didn't have much spare air left, but we were now just two kilometers from the

asteroid. It was so close we could almost taste it.

"I have to start up engines," Rex said. His voice was grim. He knew as well as I did how bad our chances were. I nodded.

Rex's hand hovered over the control.

At that moment, a scout ship from Still Standing blazed into the system. It was not in stealth mode. Both patrol ships took off to intercept.

Rex fired up engines, set us down on the asteroid, and activated clamps. He brought life support back on line, sent a quick message to CC to tell them what we'd discovered, then powered down again.

The Still Standing scout ship, and its pilot, was nothing but a cloud of atoms.

"Hope that wasn't Vance," Rex whispered.

I couldn't think of anything to say. It was the first time I've ever witnessed death in person, even from a distance. Just some poor schmuck. And it could so easily have been us.

We waited about 18 hours. I actually managed to get some sleep. I never thought I could sleep with death lurking, but I guess you learn. With each passing moment, we felt more confident that we had escaped detection.

Rex brought up minimal power and checked messages. For the first time, CC gave us an assignment we welcomed: we were to return to the previous system, in the hope that we would be alone this time, and attempt to chart it again.

Rex disengaged the clamps. I could have kissed that beautiful asteroid. I decided to name it Salvation. Maybe no system chart will ever call it that, but I will.

We brought the ship up to full power and got the hell out of there.

GALAC-TAC



"Should've put more shields on this one ... Did anyone remember to reload the torpedoes?"

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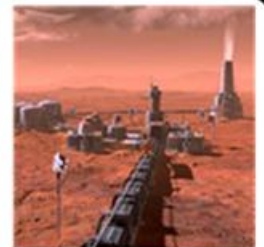
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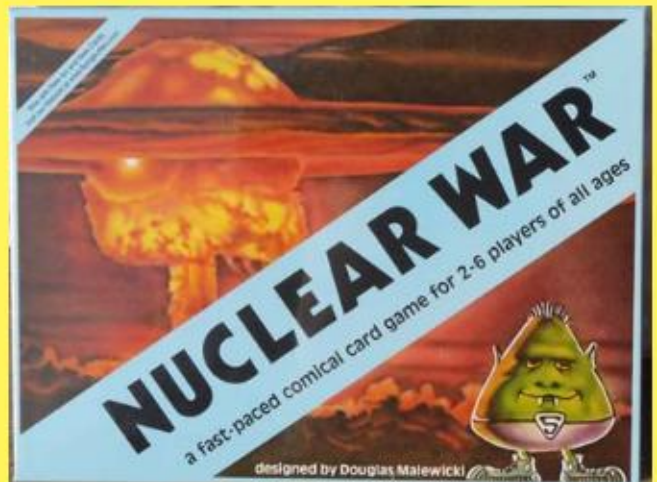
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Duel2

A Review

By Ned Leffingwell

[Duel2](#) is a play-by-mail game run by Reality Simulations in which you control a stable of gladiators in the fantasy world of Alastari. I had seen ads for Duel2 in Dragon magazine and wondered how it worked. I did some research on the company's website (www.reality.com) and after a few years decided to order a free setup.

A game setup provides you with a team of five gladiators. Your gladiators come with pre-rolled stats, like a Dungeons & Dragons character. Each character has a set of points that you can use to improve the fighter's stats. You also get to choose their fighting style. First time players receive a free turn setup, and any gladiators who die are replaced with a newly rolled character for free. If you wish to start a new stable of fighters after the first one the cost is \$5.00 per team. Turns are \$3.25 + \$1.50 for each gladiator that you have fight for that turn. You are not obliged to fight all of your gladiators every turn. That was one of the aspects that drew me to the game. I felt that I could

choose how much effort and money I could put in for each turn.

As a player you are assigned to an arena. Newbies begin in the arena "Noblish Island", where they get plenty of advice and support. After ten fights you will then graduate to another arena of your choosing. Each turn you decide how many of your five gladiators to enter into combat. For each gladiator you

decide what weapons to arm them with and what armor they will use. You also decide how they will fight for each of the six rounds of the match and how they will fight if they become desperate. You decide factors like offensive effort and defensive effort by assigning them a number from 1 to 10. I will not go into detail about the

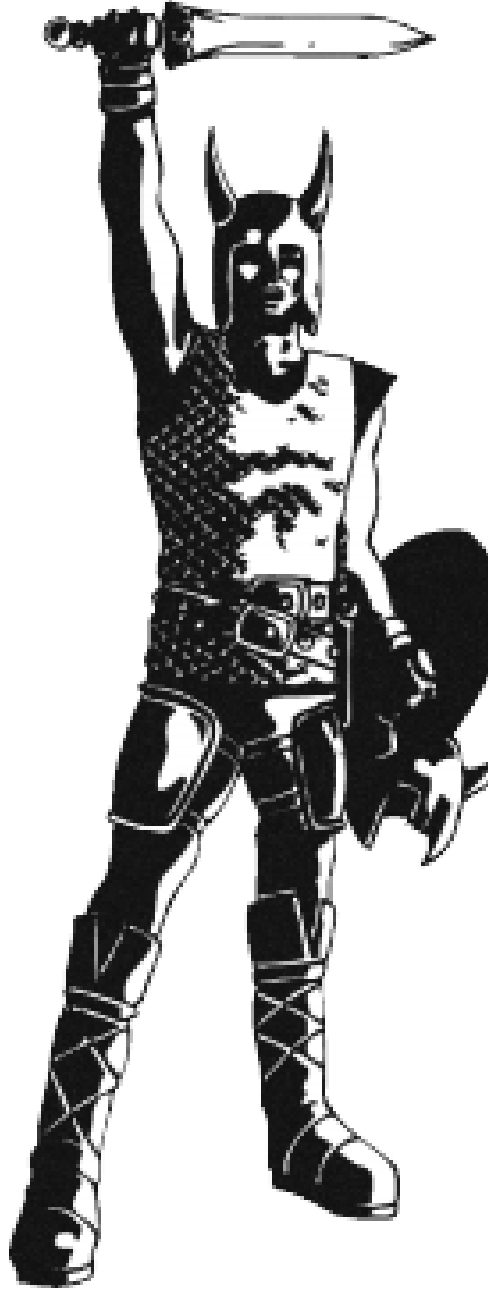
rules as they are available free online at reality.com, rather I will discuss the feel of the game.

When I play games, theme is important. I would rather lose a game that made me feel like I was a raging barbarian than win a game that made me feel like I was filling out a tax form. I give Duel2 a B+ on theme. There are a myriad of

"I would rather lose a game that made me feel like I was a raging barbarian than win a game that made me feel like I was filling out a tax form."

fighting styles, weapons, and armor in the game. The intricacies of how these all interact allow for an interesting game. I felt like a gladiator, gearing up in exotic armor to enter the field of battle. When I received my turn results I read through a battle report that described a blow-by-blow struggle where swords clashed and wounds bled. The fight reports are full of flavor and players can even customize the taunts that their gladiators say. After victories or defeats I could use the information from the battle report to plan accordingly for the next match.

This variety also keeps the game fresh. There is a large amount of combinations that a player can try. Do you want your basher to come in lightly armored so he can attack faster? Do you want your slasher to try a different combination of sword and shield? In gameplay, I give Duel2 an A. Filling out a turn sheet is simple. Pick the fighter's armor, weapons, and tactics. Then choose how they will attack and defend each round and send them off. However, the game



offers even more choices for those who wish to delve deeper. Fighters can challenge other fighters, or choose to avoid certain teams. If a gladiator was killed in the arena, you can challenge the killer to a Bloodfeud Challenge. Challenging involves filling out a specific strategy for the challenge, and by making strategic challenges or avoiding certain teams players can influence their team's standing.

Pros: Duel2 is an easy way to start playing a play-by-mail game. There are plenty of arenas so after requesting a setup you will be able to play right away. The game doesn't have the same wait period that other play-by-mail games have. The fight forms are easy to fill out, yet there is a lot of depth and nuance to the strategy of the fights. If you just want to arm your warrior with a warhammer and have him smash as hard as he can every round then you can do that. However, you can also devise different strategies for every minute of the fight, or change styles based on certain opponents. The game has as much or as little complexity as you want. The value is also good. You



are not required to fight every gladiator each turn, so you can spend as little as \$4.75 and as much as \$10.75, although it can be argued that a team will do better the more fighters it fields.

Cons: The game is open ended, meaning you play until you decide you don't want to play anymore. The goal is to increase your wins and the level of your gladiators. It is like a D&D fight encounter that goes on forever. You can take a break whenever you wish and start up again when you are ready. I am taking a break from Duel2 while I play Hyborian War. Also, the nature of the game is somewhat static. It is fight after fight. There is no movement on a map, no grand political scheming, and no big picture. I have read about teams colluding together, but I never reached that level of play. Another minor issue is that turns have to be sent in via postal mail. Duel2 turns cannot be sent in via email, even though Reality Simulations accepts email turns for the other two games that it runs. This is not really a con in my book, as I love the look of the turn sheets and the tactile experience of filling them out.

Conclusion: Duel2 is a fun play-by-mail game that would appeal to fans of fantasy and one-on-one melee combat. The price and fact that a player can

begin right away make it a great entry point for new play-by-mail players. If you want to see what play-by-mail is about this is a great way to start.



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Reader Feedback

PlayByMail.Net forum user ExoticV8 speaks!

Brian Collier

In response to your request for feedback, here are my thoughts.

What makes turn results special to you?

Since I first started PBM in the mid 1980s, I always enjoyed opening the mailbox and finding a hefty envelope with the return address of a PBM game. I never knew exactly what day the turn results would arrive, but always thought, "Hey, my *Duelmasters* turns are in," or whichever game had arrived.

In the late 20th century, this was akin to receiving a letter from a friend, except this was a letter from many friends, all in one envelope. Fast forward to the early 21st century, when the only things in the mailbox are junk mail flyers and an occasional bill from a company that doesn't do online banking, the discovery of an envelope from *Duel II* still elicits, "Hey, my *Duelmasters* turns are in," even though the name has changed.

There's a strong link from my present to my past, when I get a printed record of my interactions with dozens of other people all over the country, and we're all playing this game that has been going for decades now. I realize that I could log into dozens of online MMOs and have a fully immersive, immediate experience

with thousands of other players, but there's something significant about a small company sitting in the desert somewhere, defiantly receiving and transmitting analog data via a slow government delivery service.

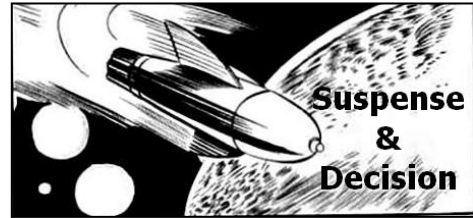
Of all of the features or articles that have appeared in *Suspense & Decision* magazine over its entire span, to date, which have been your personal favorite ones - and why?

When I open a new issue of *Suspense & Decision*, I have to force myself not to turn immediately to Douglas Neman's latest installment of the *Galac-Tac Chronicles*. I enjoy reading everything in the magazine, even the ads, but Neman's stories are like the Tootsie roll center of a Charms Pop - you want to savor your way through the candy coating to get at the chocolatey core.

Neman takes what is an enjoyable but essentially dry, tactical, turn-based game, and turns it into social commentary with his characters who just want to scrape together a few moments

of fun in between the countless days of scouting the vast galaxy.

Thank you, again, for all your effort and devotion to *Suspense & Decision* over the years.



PBM Gaming

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the
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wants


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Play By Mail
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WITH YOU!

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A Return to the Throne

War of Dwarves and Orcs in Clash of Legends

Charles Mosteller

War is Hell! So is gaming.

As if I didn't already have enough things gobbling my time up, I decided to let another monster in my door - namely, I signed up for another game of [Clash of Legends](#). This time around? A scenario titled War of Dwarves and Orcs.

This review picks up as my game of Clash of Legends heads into Turn #3. If you're interested in learning of my struggles leading up to this article, then be sure to head straight over to the

[PlayByMail.Net forum](#).

Though I have posted a few times in that particular discussion thread (which I created to use as a sort of diary to contain my thoughts and feelings that I encounter from this Clash of Legends' experience), most of what I have posted there, thus far, deals with me trying to come to terms with the game's interface, more so than any in-depth insight into the finer points of the game's mechanics

and experiences with other players marauding armies and cunning characters.

Even if you don't care about any of that, though, welcome aboard for the ride that this articles shall take you on, short though it may be.



Starting map for War of Dwarves and Orcs.

As this game of Clash of Legends proceeds, I will try to convey more and more of the actual experience of playing

the game, so that others can read it and determine for themselves whether they think that the Clash of Legends gaming system

might be something that they could sink their own teeth into.

Clash of Legends is under active and continuous development. While not complete (Will it ever be?), it is a fairly polished game system. The worst part about it, thus far, has been with grasping the interface - even though I actually played the game, before, although with a different scenario. However, as I now

prepare to submit turn orders for Turn #3, I seem to have overcome the initial obstacles that lay in my path to participating in this game, once more. Maybe I'm just getting older, eh? Be that as it may, the more intuitive any game's interface is, the less likely that the game is to lose new players prematurely. That's how I see it, anyway.

While not much time has transpired in this game of Clash of Legends, yet, I seem to have managed to make things worse for my kingdom from just a handful of choices. I burned through my kingdom's initial gold reserves on the very first turn, and turn two saw me resort to changing the tax rate to one hundred percent. And that was on top of also demanding extra taxes from the subjects of my kingdom.

Pity my kingdom's poor population, for the yoke upon them is heavy, and their future uncertain. An experienced player could likely avoid such a harsh early turn of events, but part of the fun of playing a game such as this is learning things the hard way.

Getting your kingdom in a financial bind can sap your desire for playing a position in a game, though, so if you dare to

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enter the fray that is Clash of Legends, I encourage you to spend a little more time than I did coming to terms with the fiscal impact of the orders that you issue to your kingdom.

Speaking of which, thus far at least, it appears that the orders that I will be issuing for my kingdom from turn-to-turn will fall into two basic categories - orders issued to my characters and orders issued to my cities.

In this particular game, which is Game #421 (Sssh! Don't tell anyone!), I play the position of the Northmen. Not my first choice for play in this scenario, but apparently it was, as I must not of issued a preference. No matter, now, however for both Fate and Destiny have conspired against me, and the die has been cast.

In Turn #1, scattered among my turn orders for that initial turn was the naming of some new characters. Since the number of characters that you control directly impacts how many orders that you can issue each turn, then the more, the better, as far as I am concerned. Of course, the downside to naming new characters, which will then appear awaiting you to issue orders to them the following turn, is that if you

hire too many too quickly, then you run the risk of putting an excessive drain upon your limited starting resources - *namely, gold.*

While I am certainly no master of the rules at this stage of things, if for no other reason than because I haven't actually read all of the way through the rulebook, yet, I do grasp

enough, already, to know that a number of choices lay before you, when you assume command of a position to play in Clash of Legends - *and some of those choices are very tempting, indeed!*

Perhaps a little too tempting.

Why? Because the natural inclination is to do a little bit of everything. Name new characters. Upgrade the size of your cities. Build defenses. Recruit troops. So much temptation!

So, if I have any word of advice in particular to toss your way at the beginning of your first Clash of Legends game, it would be not allow yourself to fall prey to your own temptations. Resist the temptation to do too much, too fast. For, if you do, know that there will be consequences to bear!



The Kingdom of the Northmen

Thus far, even though I have written to all of my designated allies in this particular scenario, only a single one of them has bothered to respond. I fear that this does not bode well for my

Northmen kingdom and its peoples over the long term. Assuming, of course that I survive long enough for there to even be a long term. The very fact that I am still here, after the first two turns without missing a

turn, on the contrary, bodes well. As in virtually every other game that I have ever played, it would seem that in Clash of Legends, your biggest enemy may well turn out to be yourself.

Thus, don't throw caution to the wind, but rather, bother with the task of figuring out much gold that you will spend, collectively, each and every turn. If necessary, revise your turn orders before you send them in, so that you won't be kicking yourself in the ass once you get a look at your kingdom's financial condition once you receive your turn results. Where your kingdom's treasury is concerned, know ye that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. There's a reason why that old saying is sage advice. Therefore, let the wise hear and take heed!

When the game first started, I guess that I didn't really feel a lot of anything in particular. One lesson to be learned from this is to take an active interest in what kingdom that you choose to play. After all, not only are you the one deciding what orders will get carried out through your characters and your cities, you are also the spirit behind your kingdom and its peoples. If you find your choice to be drab or uninteresting or, God forbid, boring, then it can negatively impact you by increasing the risk of you dropping out of the game or of you losing interest in the game, which is not to the betterment of the overall game experience for either you or the other players in the game.

When you start a new game of Clash of Legends, and especially if it is your very first game of Clash of Legends, you may find yourself in a position similar to my own in Game #421. You're just sort of there. You're not feeling much of anything. You're not sure what to do. Heck, you don't really have a grasp for either the rules or the mechanics. At most, you smell the flavor of a gaming experience that hasn't even started cooking in earnest, yet.

One of the core and fundamental reasons that a game's interface is so important is

After all, not only are you the one deciding what orders will get carried out through your characters and your cities, you are also the spirit behind your kingdom and its peoples.

because, many times, the person who has undertaken to play a game for the very first time is utterly devoid of familiarity with the game in question. Every thing - *every last thing* - that a game designer and a game programmer can do to make it smoother and easier and quicker for a prospective player to be able to deal with the amorphous blob of what they don't know is to the advantage of every player in the game.

Clash of Legends isn't my first encounter with a game interface that could be made more intuitive. It likely won't be my last encounter with game interfaces that aren't refined sufficiently in this area, the critical area of intuitiveness, either. After

all, if you lose a player due to your game's interface before the atmosphere, flavor, and mechanics of your game have sufficient time and opportunity to snag them for good, then what, pray tell me, have you actually achieved but another statistical "could have been?"

If I end up not submitting turn orders for a game because the whole process of those initial, early turns just leaves me shaking my head at the various ways that the game designer or game programmer chose to assume I would just necessarily understand what it is that I, as a player new to their game, need to do, then the game starts off

short-handed, even before things get underway good.

It is important - nay, imperative - to distinguish between interface and mechanics, between interface experience and the experience of the game. For the prospective player, though, the game interface is Obstacle Number One. If you lose them there, then the rest of the whole ball of wax won't matter. To appreciate the full measure of your game's beauty, they've got to get past that initial hurdle.

Plus, if a given position isn't one that the player is attached to or imaginatively stimulated by going into the game, then the game interface can well be an executioner - and the reality is that a lot of starting game dropouts can be avoided in various different games simply by facilitating getting the player to stay in the game long enough for enough to sink in to enable your game to addict them to it. I would highlight and underscore that all of the advertising and marketing and colorful descriptions are no true substitute for a game interface that is intuitive, and which makes it possible for a new player to tackle the

opening stage of the game in a way that makes sense to them.

For the very reason that game designers and game programmers necessarily possess a heightened degree of intimate familiarity with what to do and how to do

it, where their respective games are concerned, all the more important, then, design a game interface that is geared toward individuals who possess zero degree of familiarity. After all, if they can play your game, then virtually anyone can. If they can't, then all of the mentors in the world may not prove to be enough, when all is ultimately said and done.

For me, the biggest key to getting me to successfully submit a

set of turn orders, at all, for Clash of Legends in Game #421 was the light bulb moment when I "got it" about order slots. I cannot stress enough just how utterly vital this one piece of understanding turned out to be. I dare suggest that, when Game #421 sounds its game end knell, that the single most important thing to happen to me as a player in this game will be that Turn #1 moment when I figured out the slots enchilada.

For me, the biggest key to getting me to successfully submit a set of turn orders, at all, for Clash of Legends in Game #421 was the light bulb moment when I "got it" about order slots. I cannot stress enough just how utterly vital this one piece of understanding turned out to be.

Now, here we are a couple of turns later, and I'm still cooking with Crisco. I'm still here. My kingdom is still alive and kicking (even if being taxed to death, at the moment). There are numerous other games that I have tried my hand at that I haven't gotten this far, and it's usually due to one of two things: game interface or game rules. These days, there's just too many other choices, when it comes to entertainment, for people have to waste their time and their energy on games that suffer from interface issues or rules overload.

Clash of Legends reminds me of other games, in various ways. Middle-earth PBM, Fall of Rome, and Alamaze all come to mind. It really isn't as simple as saying that I like this game better than that one - *not at this stage, anyway*.

That said, I will let the fact that I am currently playing in Clash of Legends, rather than any of those other three games, speak for itself. I'm here, in the game, and out the gate of the opening turns. I know how to issue orders, and now it boils down to just which orders to issue in which situation in which turn.

Clash of Legends, again for comparison's sake, isn't really like Hyborian War, even

though they both have armies and they both involve conquest of territory. Hyborian War characters only get one character order "slot" per turn, whereas Clash of Legend characters have multiple order slots per turn. Clash of Legends , Dwarves and Orcs scenario, involves the conquest and destruction of cities,

whereas Hyborian War involves the conquest of provinces.

Clash of Legends is free to play. Free doesn't make a game better, necessarily, but likewise, partaking of a for-pay gaming experience doesn't necessarily guarantee a superior gaming experience, either.

Ultimately, the primary objective, when it comes to playing any game is

to have fun. Having worked my way past the initial game interface barrier for Clash of Legends, now I feel that I am able to focus upon the fun part.

I'll either get better in Clash of Legends going forth, or my kingdom and its characters and its troops shall die trying. But, I intend to be there. Getting past the initial interface issues yields a higher degree of commitment to obtaining a fuller, more complete game experience.

As I headed into Turn #2 of Clash of Legends Game #421, my royal coffers were substantially bare, after I burned

Clash of Legends is free to play. Free doesn't make a game better, necessarily, but likewise, partaking of a for-pay gaming experience doesn't necessarily guarantee a superior gaming experience, either.

through gold with my turn order choices in Turn #1. Reality intervened in this fantasy game, and I couldn't really do what I wanted to, due to having to now tackle the fiscal crisis that I, myself, had created in the vast span of but a single game turn.

Maybe I was over-reacting, but at least I was trying to hang in there, trying to still move forward. A new challenge reared its head, heading into Turn #2. Namely, could I avert fiscal disaster, and keep my treasury's head above water. To be honest with you, things aren't looking real good, right now. Of course, that's primarily due to me going back and changing some of my turn orders that I initially issued. The bottom line? I had planned to disband some troops, in my Turn #2 orders. My final set of turn orders for that turn, however, saw me doing other things, instead.

And now, my ass is in a gold colored bind. Are you guys sure that a game is more fun when you have to worry about how much money that you are spending?

For some, it probably is. For me, not so much. Dark episodes of Fall of Rome come to mind. At least in this particular scenario of Clash of Legends, I don't really have to fret over my kingdom going bankrupt. Oh, sure, there will be consequences, but outright elimination from the game isn't one of them.

Going forward from this point, I've got to get a better grip on the fiscal end of things. I've either got to disband some troops, or burn them off in military

campaigns. They're just too damned expensive! So much for royal prerogative.

I've also got to get my kingdom's tax rate back down in a sizeable way. Why? Because my current tax rate is causing loyalty in my cities to plummet. ***Pah!***
Disloyal bastards!

On the military end of things, I'm still pretty much lost in space. Ignorance of your military capabilities and limitations creates a kind of blank zone in the newbie player's mind. This really negatively impacts the enthusiasm level.

Where to go? Whom to attack? What are my chances? All still unknowns, at this point. But, I've got to do something, so conflict is inevitable. The weight of decision is bearing down upon me. All that I want to do is to have fun. Wasn't that a Cindy Lauper song?

For me, this game is a learning game. It's not really about winning, but about experimenting. My first experiment was with the game's interface. My moaning and grumbling and complaining aside, I chalk that first experiment up as a success.

Again, I'm still here, aren't I?



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The Future of Hyborian War

Don't Count RSI Out, Just Yet!

Charles Mosteller

Hyborian War is a play by mail game of imperial conquest set in the Hyborian Age. If you've heard of the barbarian, Conan, before, then you're already aware of the setting where this game plays out. It is a setting originally brought to life by the distinguished American author, Robert E. Howard, and Reality

Simulations, Inc. - or RSI, as the company is more widely known by long time players of the game - is the PBM company that first brought this game to market over three decades ago. The year was 1984, if memory serves me correctly.

Thirty-three years is a long time, and for many players of the game, including die-hard veterans of the game, the game seems overdue for an update.

Ultimately, the decision to update the

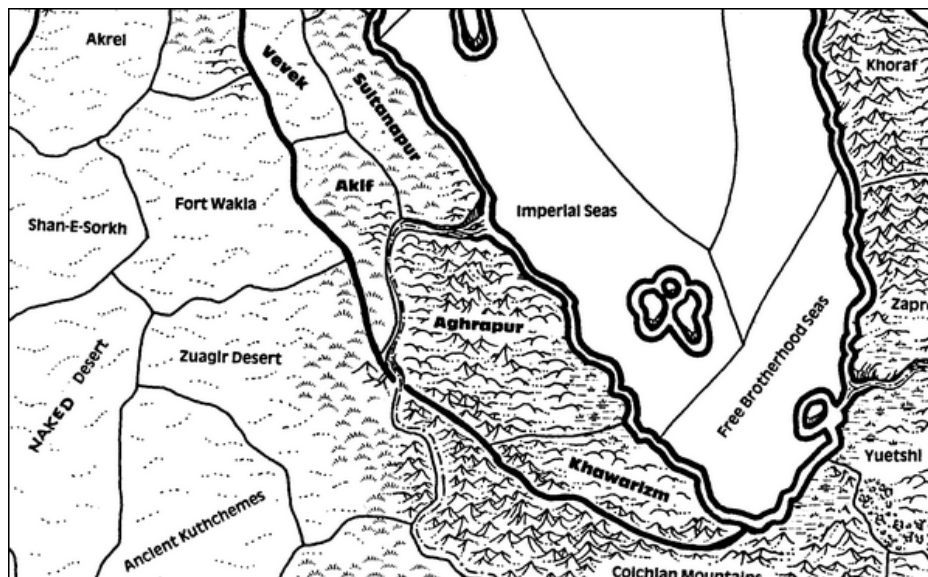
game in some way, shape, or form lies with Lee Kline (President of RSI) and the folks out in Tempe, Arizona, which is where RSI's operations headquarters is located.

The list of proposed changes offered up by players to RSI down through the

years would fill a voluminous tome, and there's just too many of them to cover in the space of this article. Indeed, the purpose of this article is not to recount all of the various proposed

changes, be they big or small. Rather, my aim in

writing this article is to explain why I think that there is still a good possibility that RSI may one day finally take the game to what I feel should rightfully be regarded as the next stage in its legacy of development.



Gleaming mailed and silken clad riders, masters of the Vilayet Sea, Turan revels in sweeping the barely contested wastelands to the west and south.

Most PBM companies gave up the ghost, long ago. Reality Simulations, however, has continued to hang in there, through both thick and thin, through good times for the PBM industry and bad. The Internet hasn't killed off either RSI or Hyborian War. Both are still with the gaming world. Both are alive and active and still trucking.

Make no mistake - rumors of every size and shape and color have floated across the PBM realm for many years on end. Depending upon who you listen to in the circle of players of the game, Hyborian War has been either incrementally updated from time to time or its development is dead in the water.

Players have long cried out for changes that they would love to see implemented. They love the game, and many of them feel that any game begins

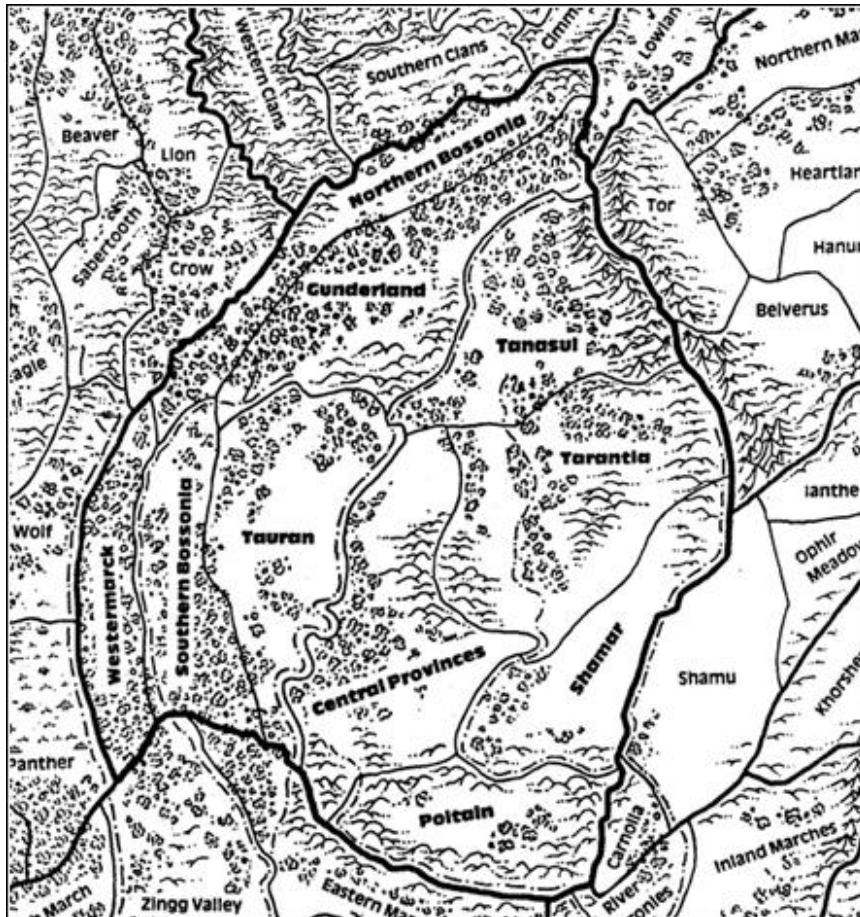
to grow stale, after playing it a lot of times. They're not asking for the moon, just what they genuinely feel to be changes that would be in the best interest of the game - changes that they feel would reinvigorate the game with renewed interest and a surge in interest

by players, both old and new, alike.

RSI, on the other hand, has its own perspective on changes that get proposed. The staff at Reality Simulations has a great deal of first-hand experience gained over an extended period of time with the game. Hyborian War wasn't programmed yesterday. It traces its origin back to

a time before some of the game's current players were even born.

To RSI, implementing changes to the game carries with it various risks. Surely, a game from a bygone era that continues to survive in the current day and age



Symbol of might in the Hyborian Age, Aquilonia with her legendary armies of Bossonian archers, Gunderland pikemen and Poitanian knights, wields indisputably the supreme military power of the Western world.

deserves a little credit. Surely, RSI must have done something right, to continue to retain a sizable body of players who have played the game stretching back across so many years.

If there are better games available for play on the market, today, then why hasn't the game died, yet? The flip side of that coin is, if the game doesn't need updating, then why has the overall player base declined so significantly since its heyday way back when?

Many issues in life which divide people, individuals from all walks of life who share a common interest, tend to be more complex than may at first appear to be the case, when people discuss those very same issues in casual conversation. To make changes to Hyborian War would require, at a bare minimum, an investment of time and energy and manpower. Could it be that making changes to the game is a feasible undertaking? Or could it be that there is more to such an undertaking than the

players of Hyborian War fully appreciate?

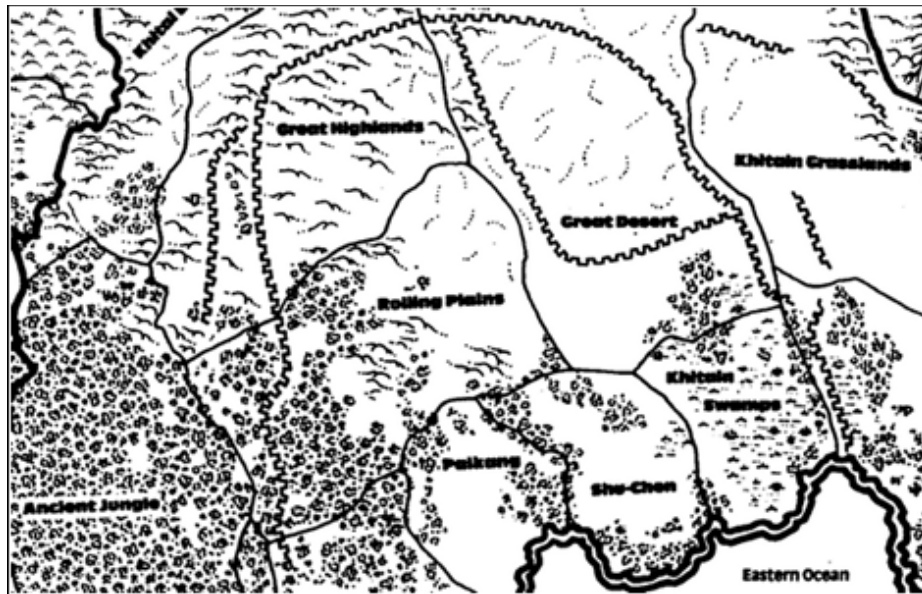
To be fair, RSI runs other games - Duel2 and Forgotten Realms: War of the Avatars. The staff of Reality Simulations also operates a book store. Why should the making changes to Hyborian War

rank as a higher priority than RSI focusing upon - and investing in - these other aspects of its overall operations?

As someone who never really seems to have sufficient time to enable me

to publish Suspense & Decision with unerring regularity, I can certainly relate to - and sympathize with - the folks at RSI being stretched thin, when it comes to having large chunks of time available to focus on nothing but making changes to a game that is written in programming languages that are likely no longer in vogue, these days.

The truth be told, there are lots of things in all of our respective lives that just nibble and gobble away at our time. There's never enough of it, and what there is of it is always in demand - by something or by someone for any of a



Khitai is forever at war with Kambulja to the south whose god-kings vie with them for supremacy in the arcane mysteries of the scarlet circle.

development is concerned, RSI has signalled at least a willingness to listen to what players of the game have had to say. And this willingness to listen actually stretches back a span of many years.

It isn't my place to defend RSI, just as it isn't my place to defend the players of Hyborian

War. For my own part, I'm highly unlikely to win any popularity contest, anytime soon. Would I like to see RSI embrace some changes to Hyborian War? Oh, sure.

Certainly, I would.

However, I'm realistic enough to realize that

no amount of attempts at pressuring RSI is ever likely to bear fruit, where changes to Hyborian War are concerned.

The simple truth is that there is a chance that RSI will never make any more changes to the game, and likewise, there is also a chance that RSI may yet implement some changes to the game. From my perspective, my gut instinct

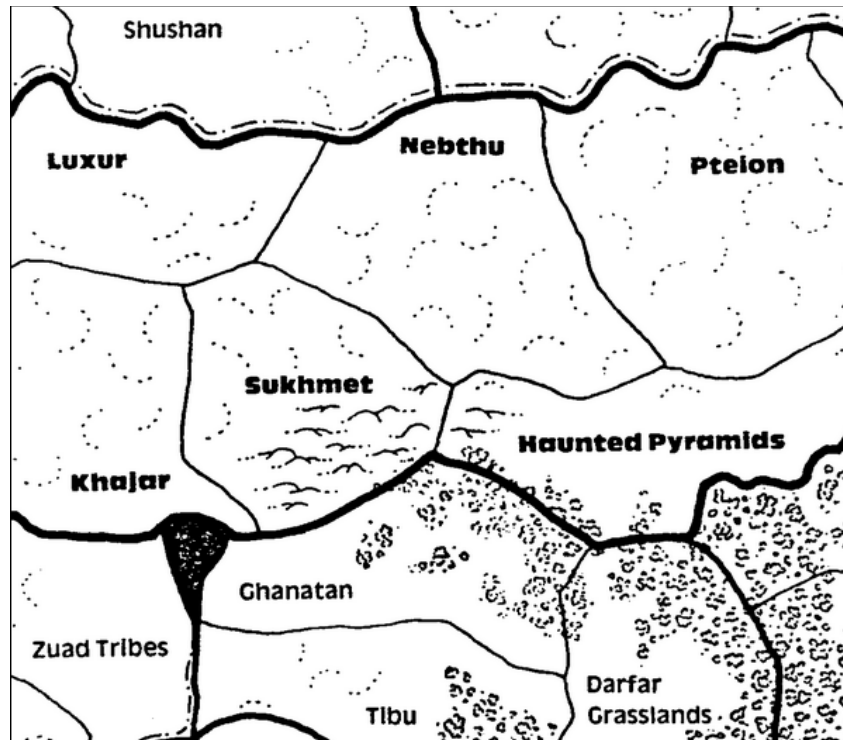
tells me that there are two basic paths toward change, where Hyborian War is concerned.

One is with players, and the other is with RSI.

On the player end of things, what I feel to be the most likely way to achieve the

equivalent of change to the game of Hyborian War is through developing a new strain of organized games. Certainly, a rather compelling case can be made in RSI's favor, as far as that play by mail company being willing to embrace and go with the flow of the organized game concept. Under

the auspices of organized games, games of Hyborian War have started quicker than regular games that RSI runs. Over the years, there have been many different organized games of Hyborian War, and even many of RSI's biggest and most vocal critics of RSI's failure to continue developing the game with changes to keep it fresh and interesting



Slumbering in her desert retreats, protected behind the mighty and brooding Styx river, lies Stygia. The Stygian army is never without the backing of wizards well versed in black battle magics, most often of the priesthood of Set.

over thirty years later have, themselves, become die-hard advocates of - and participants in - organized games of Hyborian War.

Over the years, many different people have

organized groups of players to create organized games with different flavor and variety. Yet, are there limits to what can be achieved via this player-centric approach to growing

the Hyborian War legacy? Certainly. No doubt about it. After all, when it comes to the potential for implementing changes to the game to maximize its freshness and its addicting qualities, RSI continues to hold all of the high cards.

The high cards, in this sense, are control over the game's core, underlying programming, the game's base data files, and the actual direct ability to add things to the game, such as additional troops or new characters, to name but a

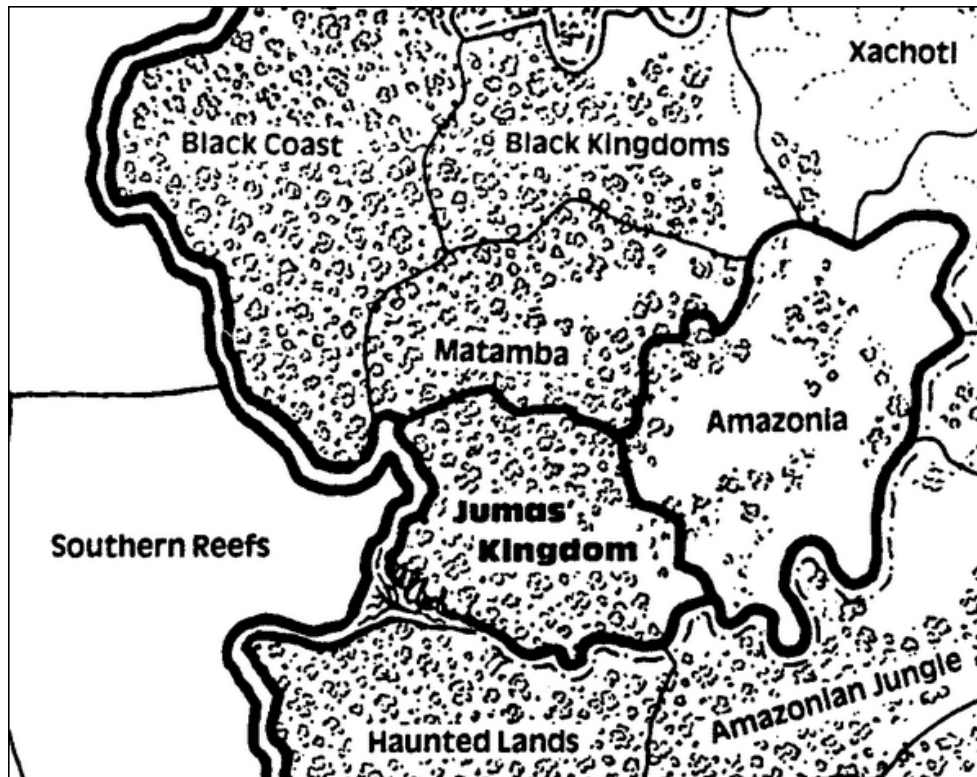
couple.

On RSI's end, it basically has several choices, going forward. The past is behind us, both for RSI and for Hyborian War players, and none of us can change

that. What we can all contribute to is a positive energy for positive change, going forward.

RSI's options, as I see them, are:

(1) Continue the status quo, and make no changes to the game's



Juma's Kingdom is relatively unbeleaguered in early years and can look to the north and south coastlines for easy expansion.

code, its base data files, its kingdom-setup reports, or any aspects of its processing and operations. Rather than change, this would simply be a continuance of the long-standing status quo. Is a perpetuation of the current status quo likely to succeed at reinvigorating the game's player base, though? It would seem questionable, at best, if the past record is reviewed, where this subject is concerned.

(2) RSI can make changes to the game's core program. Is this feasible, though? I dare suggest that this approach would be the one most likely to cause headaches for both RSI and players, especially if

RSI got something wrong with its revisions to the game's underlying code, the core of the game's existence. If this route were the most feasible route, the path most likely to succeed, then the question begs to be

asked: Why hasn't RSI already made major changes to the game in recent years? While back-ups to the game's code can be made, one cannot back-up expenditures of time lost to programming errors run amok. The axiom of, if it's not broke, then don't fix it comes to mind.

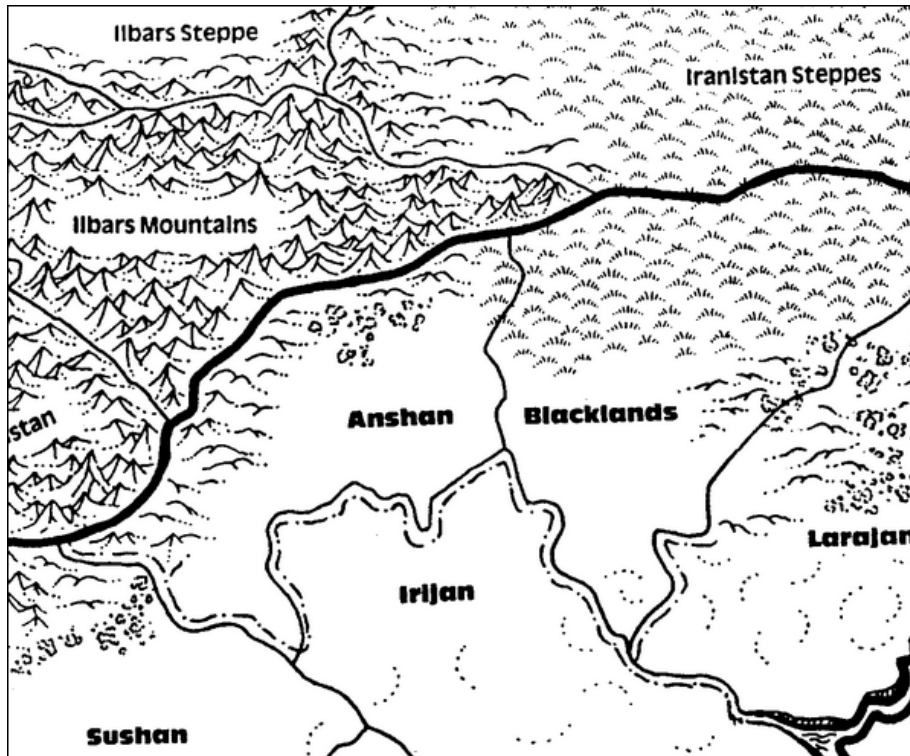
(3) RSI can approach making changes to the game via an indirect method, one that doesn't entail any actual changes to the game's core code. It can do this by

way of updating the portions of data contained in the game's accompany base data files - files that the game's core program draws from, as needed and

called during the processing of turns.

(4) RSI has the ability, already, to do certain things that yield the equivalent of making changes to the game - again, without actually fiddling around with the programming of the game. Furthermore, RSI already

possesses the ability to make "changes" of this nature as the game progresses. The real key to success with this and the previous outlined option lies with an approach that is disciplined and structured. As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In other words, why mess with the underlying code, when you can milk the cow of progress without mucking up code that you don't want to touch in the first place?



Ancient and rich, Iranistan uses the Kossaks and the Iibars hillmen as border defenses to turn back the swift horse-archers of their long standing foes in Turan and Hyrkania.

I say all of this to get to a concept that I believe holds enormous potential for re-energizing the game and for reinvigorating the game's player base. That concept is: *Where there's a will, there's a way.*

The desired objective, of course, is not to make life Hell on the folks at Reality Simulations. Rather, the desired objective is to try and craft a way forward, a path that will make some rather significant progress for both players and RSI, alike, on a game that is a real gem in the crown jewels of play by mail gaming history.

If RSI does nothing, then common sense dictates that no progress will get made. *Ever!*

On the other hand, if the Hyborian War player base can see no other clear path forward out of the programming wilderness to which it finds itself in, unwilling to accept anything less than a full-scale revamp of the game's underlying code, or major components, thereof, then common sense tells me that no real progress of note will ever get made that way, either. Period!

So, my own gaze has long since shifted to what I feel holds much solid potential to be a fertile common ground.

The fact of the matter is that, while everything that the player base wants, change-wise, cannot be achieved short of RSI making a litany of changes to the game's underlying code, the reality is that an abundance of possibilities for real

and meaningful change can be accomplished, and without RSI even having to touch the game's core programming.

Absent anyone at RSI ever setting any kind of timeframe to start down the path of updating the game in any way, shape, or form, then both RSI and the Hyborian War player base will remain in the equivalent of a state of limbo.

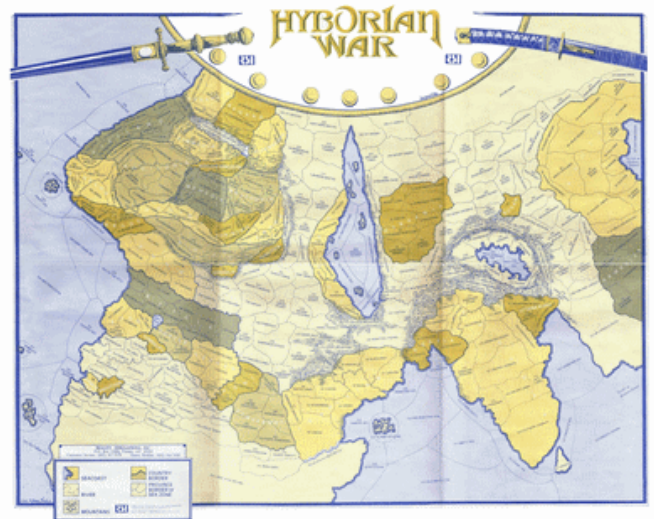
One key point that I would like to stress and underscore is that all changes of this no-programming-changes-required approach do not have to be implemented all at once. What I propose is just exactly that - a starting point.

A starting point for change.

A real starting point for progress.

A real hope that a brighter, more profitable future for all can be had.

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

Diplomacy World #138



Summer 2017 Issue
www.diplomacyworld.net

Back in 1974, Dr. Walter Buchanan decided that the growing postal *Diplomacy* hobby needed a "flagship" zine. The purpose of such a publication would be to distribute hobby news, discuss strategy and tactics, introduce new variants, and in general give the hobby member a place to go for everything EXCEPT to play the game itself.

Diplomacy World was born! Now approaching its 40th year of publication,

Diplomacy World has gone through many changes. What was once a postal zine, available only by subscription and in printed format, is now freely downloaded from the internet (along with the archive of every issue from #1 up to the latest release). Black and white has become color. With no postal expenses, size is less of a problem. Like the hobby itself, *Diplomacy World* has seen its ups and downs, but both remain.

www.diplomacyworld.net

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Suspense & Decision magazine extends sincere condolences to the family, friends, and loved ones of Diplomacy player James Burgess!*





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Kingdom of the Quote

"Because the reach of words knows no bounds!"

Suspense & Decision is an awesome internet magazine about PBM gaming. Indeed, you can really tell that the editors of the magazine really love bringing some much needed attention to this struggling hobby. I believe Rick has been interviewed at least once by them. Anyway, each issue has interviews from game designers and some truly brilliant artwork. The magazines are free to read online and new issues are published infrequently. Do yourself a favor and check it out!

- [Vectrex](#),
Flying Buffalo Forums

I really like the design of the game, Rick. I think you are making tremendous progress to make The Maelstrom the best version of the game to date. I LOVE the idea of the ant kingdom you came up with. If you feel like ants don't fit the model of Alamaze, perhaps keep the idea and give it a more 'humanistic' or 'fantasy-esque' kingdom title. I honestly have been thinking of a kingdom designed like the Ant

kingdom you described as I have been enjoying 3rd cycle and would love to see it make an appearance. I CAN'T WAIT FOR MAELSTROM!

- [Tomag Ironfist](#),
Alamaze Forum

The lion sharpens his claws and looks to the north. My, but he is hungry. So many troops. Where to go?

- [JBad](#),
The Road of Kings

Goddamn it; i think i have gone as far as i can in this game without actually reading any rules.

Someone point me in the direction of the latest version of the mandate please. ... le sigh

- [Tony Barnard](#),
TribeNet - PBEM Player

Hello! I'm excited to join the group. I played QOTGJs back in the late 80s/90s. I still have an old printout from one of the games (including a map that someone made) that I played. By and far, Quest was my favorite PBM game and I lamented when it went away. I've been periodically checking to see

if it's been revived every few years, and so I'm glad to see that it has! I hope there's a game starting soon, because I can't wait to join one.

- [Tom Carpenter](#)
Quest of the Great Jewels Player

Agents have landed! We've got agents running around the map now. We can mess with Churches. We've got a ton of new killer updates to the database. A long list of bugs got squished. We've got some new features baked into the map, which extended the functionality and reduced the load time of the game by about 40%.

- [Paul Mouchet](#),
Cohorts Game System Designer

Your singular achievement -- Suspense & Decision and this site -- has echoed across time and space in ways you can't possibly know. Your crabby enthusiasm and furious determination drove a herd of moribund cats across the prairie for the first time in a millennium.

- [ixnay](#),
PlayByMail.Net Forum

Star Fleet



Strategic Campaign in the High Arena

WARLORD

Die Hard Game Starting!!

Die Hard 43 Game is starting on September 24th, 2017. So if you have not signed up you still have time to do so. So if you are interested in joining , please send an Initial Build to warlord@play-by-e-mail.com or log into your account and use the Initial Build page for game D43 will be needed by September 24th, 2017.

Also, you can fax the initial build at 484-335-4436.

In addition to the usually Die Hard rules, the game will be using:

1. EV order will be available.
2. Random Corporation Number.
3. Guaranteed 10x10 board.
4. Player Sectors not filled will contain a 1000 EP Base on the Home Office. In addition to a number of ships. These will be NPC Corporations.

Reminder: There is a 250 ship limit and you get a Sector Special at the start please Email me your selection.

Prizes:

- \$50 - First Place
- \$25 - Second Place
- \$10 - Third Place

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Paul Franz

warlord@play-by-e-mail.com

Where We're Heading...

Who knows? Not me, that's for sure!

Honestly, I think that I have given up on trying to grasp where it is that I think that we're heading with *Suspense & Decision* magazine.

It took forever to get this issue out - *and this issue isn't really all that big of an issue*. It's been a lot like being trapped in suspended animation, and then being transported to a place where I just began tinkering, once more.

And...*voila!* Here it is. This issue just magically appeared out of thin digital air. Was it worth the wait?

For some, perhaps. For others, probably not. For me? I suppose so - simply because the ball is now rolling, again. And whenever the ball is rolling, issues manage to get published. Whether late or on time, it's

definitely better in the publishing lane, when you actually manage to get something out the door and into the hands of our waiting readership.



Can we ever get this magazine to where it needs to be? Wow! That's a tall order, and to be quite frank about it, I don't know if we will ever reach that distant objective. What I do know, though, is that we're definitely nowhere even close to that point, yet.

My assistant editor has evaporated. Or maybe he has just gotten busy with the hum drum of everyday life. I suspect that he's still out there, somewhere, so if

anybody sees him, be sure to toss a net over him and haul him back. There's more work to be done!

Jim Kemeny, who has written numerous articles for the magazine, has been experiencing difficulties even logging on to the PlayByMail.Net forum. So, silence has been emanating from his neck of the PBM woods, of late.

And the rest of the crew? Well...uh...It appears that stalwarts of the faith Sid Razavi and Douglas Neman have been saving the day, in recent issues. I appreciate both of them stepping forward and diving into the fray of writing, that articles of interest might continue to populate the pages of this magazine.

Not that no one else has been sending any articles in, mind you, for they most assuredly have.

Davin Church has been a recurring write in these pages, as has Rick McDowell. Both should be well-rested, though. I know for certain that Rick was off frolicking on vacation, just recently.

I've been spending more time at an old haunt, the last couple of weeks. The Road of Kings is a gathering point for Hyborian War players. It's run by Lloyd Barron (Yes, **THE** Lloyd Barron!), and I've been trying to drum up some renewed interest in that locale, to some small success, I think.

A part of me inside of me has long counselled that I just let this experiment in PBM journalism fall by the wayside. *"There's other things to do with our time,"* it tells me.

And, to be certain, there have been times when I have come close to listening to it, to listening to that little voice that urges me to spend my time that I allocate to this undertaking to other, "better" things.

I'm not sure what those other, better things might be, but that little voice, it always assures me that they're out there.

Then, too, there's other parts of me inside of me that are having no part of it. At least one voice inside of me is seemingly Hell-bent on punishing me, always thrashing about inside of my head and demanding that I get off my ass and continue the march toward PBM oblivion, come what may.

Then there is the more rational side of me, the one that tries to rationalize both sides of the equation. "It's just a matter of priorities, not a question of right or wrong," it says. Decisions, decisions, decisions.

An actual budget for this project continues to remain a flight of fancy. Somehow or other, I've still been succeeding in hornswoggling the cover artist, Kav, out of artwork to grace the front cover of each new issue with. He continues

to be a true blessing to our cause, for sure, for certain!

Even still, I suppose that you still want to know where we're heading. That is the name of this article section, after all.

So, here's what I'm thinking. Let's keep it manageable. What I'm thinking is this - starting with the very next issue, Issue #18, I am going to try to adhere to the "three and out" approach.



By that, I simply mean that once I have three articles in hand, whether from others or from myself, then I will publish each successive issue, in turn.

Thus, we will be shoving thick issues upon the altar of sacrifice, in the

interest of restoring some semblance of frequency to the magazine. For the last long while, there's been more suspense than decision, where new issues coming down the pike have

been concerned. We've got to alter that dynamic, if the magazine is to have any real chance of succeeding - *whatever success for a*

PBM magazine might actually look like in this day and age. Who knows?

I'm probably going to cut back on flitting across the Internet, and trying to make people in distant corners of here and there aware that a new issue of *Suspense & Decision* is out. It's really more about striking a stable balance in the allocation of my time, more than anything else.

That's right, we'll become

even more reliant upon word of mouth to get the word out, where each new issue is concerned, going forward.

I think that the real key to keeping *Suspense & Decision* going forward,



ever forward, is for me to keep it enjoyable for me to construct and publish. A lot of the ancillary stuff will likely fall by the wayside, as I consolidate my hold upon my own sanity. Yeah, that's an exaggeration, in case you were wondering.

The length of past issues has never really been at the core of what ails the magazine. In fact, what some seers of the hobby seem to fail to realize is that, at times, the longer than an issue grows, the

more that my own enthusiasm for it grows right along with the increase in the page count.

And if I don't have enthusiasm, if I lose it, if I fail to stoke it, then

without my own enthusiasm at my side, what may well be my single biggest ally in this endeavor to make a PBM magazine a reality,

again, here in the 21st Century, is likely the equivalent of the magazine being mortally wounded. Is that something that can be risked? Is it an approach likely to yield a desirable outcome?

The stark reality that we face is that every issue is zero hour.

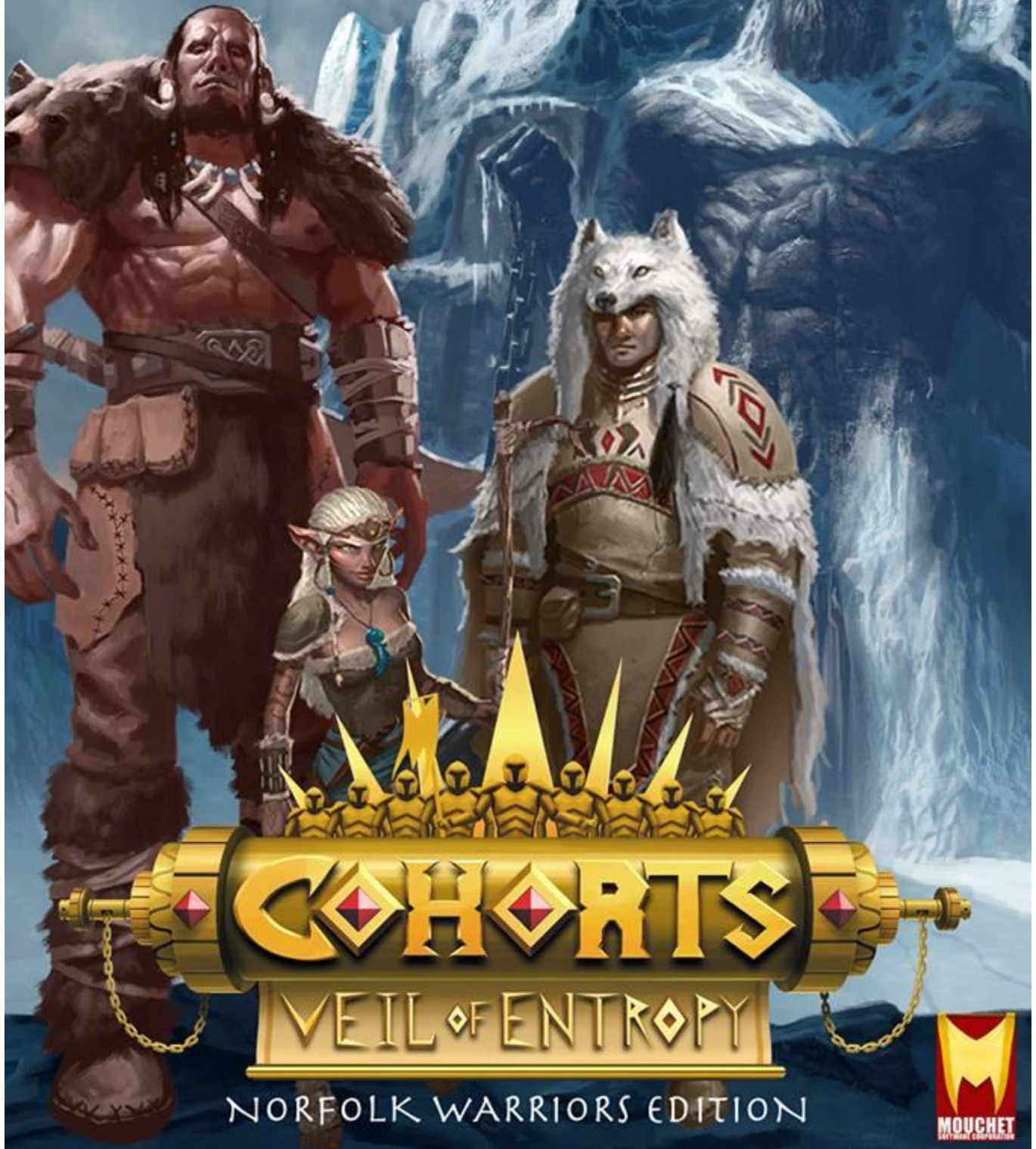
Zero hour!

We advance, at will.

And enthusiasm lies at the heart of willpower!

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