

Suspense & Decision

SEPTEMBER
2019

ISSUE

#19

SEND THESE
TURN RESULTS
OUT
IMMEDIATELY!

LORD!
WE ARE
ATTACKED!

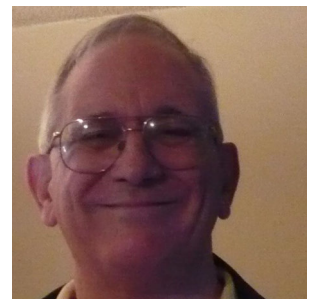
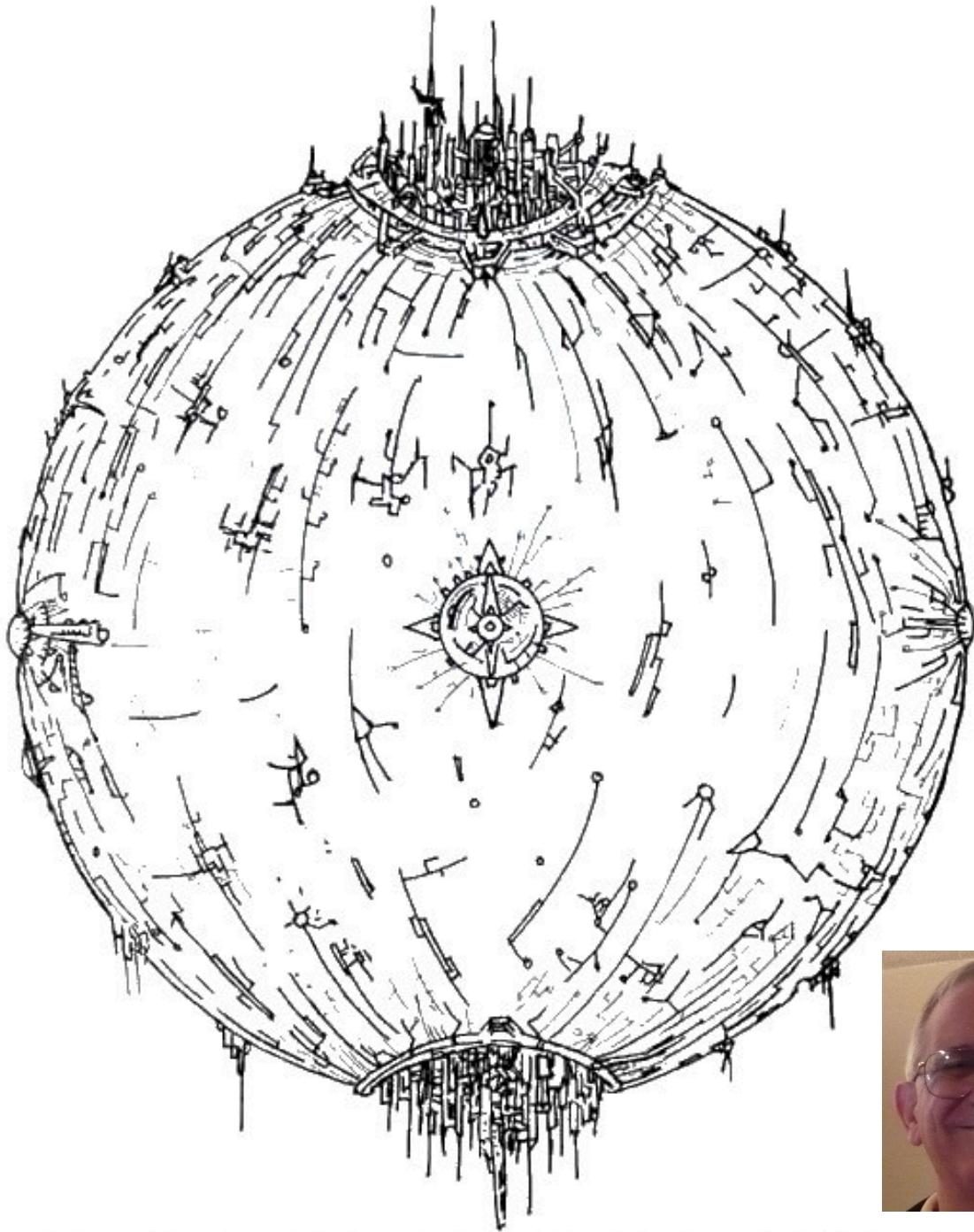
PBM
PO BOX 0114
5045 r.

CHARLES
A
BO

MS



EMPYREAN CHALLENGE



VERN HOLFORD
Rest In Peace

** This issue dedicated to the memory of Vern Holford of Superior Simulations **

October 13, 1948 – April 21, 2017

Suspense & Decision, Issue #19

September 2019

Articles

- 4 [Welcome to Issue #19!](#)
Charles Mosteller, Editor-in-Chief
- 12 ["Lightning" Galac-Tac: A Retrospective](#)
Davin Church
- 15 [Something Else Entirely!: The Arch Necromancer speaks on PBM Games](#)
Vince L. Falcone
- 21 [Ridin' Out the Storm: A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 8](#)
Douglas Neman
- 26 [Memories of Games Past: The PBM Saga of Ira Gossett](#)
Ira Lee Gossett
- 33 [Be More Than a Player: Learning by Teaching in SuperNova & Middle-earth](#)
Raven Zachary
- 50 [Dwarven Descent Into DungeonWorld: The Madhouse Saga of Gobworth Browstone](#)
Charles Mosteller, Editor-in-Chief
- 58 [Kingdom Design: Fourth generation Alamaze with all web-based interaction](#)
Rick McDowell
- 64 [Better Versus More: A Paradigm Shift In PhoenixBSE](#)
Mica Goldstone
- 67 [Where We're Heading](#)
Charles Mosteller, Editor-in-Chief

Special Mention

- 2 [Issue Dedication - Vern Holford - Superior Simulations](#)
- 24 [The Face of PBM](#)
- 72 [What did they say about Issue #18?](#)

Submission Deadline for Issue #20 is October 10th, 2019



Welcome to Issue #19!

This is a wonderful issue! Not just because of any specific content that lies herein, but because we are here, at all. Honestly, I feel the best about this magazine's chances for success, now, than at any other point since its inception. Me? I feel as if a great fire now burns within me - *the fire of PBM!*

I'm excited. I'm anxious. I'm itching to write! Things over at the PlayByMail.Net forum are still slower than they should be - slower than they need to be - but over on the [PlayByMail.Net Facebook page](#), I've really begun to notice a lot more participation, of late. The degree of interaction by and between various PBM-interested individuals is gradually increasing. And no, it's not anywhere near a tsunami-level event, but the fact that it is happening, at all, is worth paying tribute to. PBM gaming endures its share of losses and failures, so I, for one, believe that we should also lay claim to our gains and our successes, where and when and however they happen.

I recently posted on Facebook that Madhouse UK confirmed that they had received my character submission for their DungeonWorld game, and Vivienne Dunstan posted to me in response, saying, *"I'm considering taking part in one of the DungeonWorld variants. or if not a KJC game, another Madhouse or Flying Buffalo. I have email reminders sitting in my inbox waiting to deal with. You are being very encouraging with your posts."*

Who recently signed up for a game of Starweb with Flying Buffalo, Inc.? Mat Hillman. Again, another posting in the comments on the PlayByMail.Net Facebook page.

And even before I have received any turns for my DungeonWorld character from Madhouse UK, a fellow by the name of David Pennewell has already invited me to join The Order Guild and fight the Chaos. And this all happened in just one thread of one posting that I made on our Facebook page.

Typically, I have tried to keep the welcome page to just one page in length. Not this time! And over on the PBM Wiki, I've received recent help on updating various sections from Richard Lockwood (formerly of Manifestation Games), John Davis (currently of Middle-earth Games), and Peter Rzechorzek (Currently running TribeNet). Perhaps there are a few more of you out there who might be able to assist with updating a few more sections of the PBM Wiki. Don't be afraid - come on out of the PBM woodwork, that the PBM Wiki might be a more useful PBM

resource for the entire play by mail gaming community.

Chris Shefler sent word to me, recently, declaring. *"All your recent Facebook postings have inspired me to dig up some ancient artifacts in my basement."* Unfortunately, he's thrown most of his PBM stuff away (GASP!), and he can't find his rule book for The Next Empire. I wonder what Chris would say, if he knew that I recently received a message out of the blue from the self-described demented man who created The Next Empire?

That's Frank Coker, for those amongst you who remember him. And what did Frank tell me (among other things), *"There is something afoot here, because just this weekend I was looking through a box of The Next Empire materials, including ads."* Back in the day, Frank ran a PBM company called Cyborg Games. Tell me this - was it Facebook's poor design that caused Frank Coker to receive a message from me two and one-half years after the fact, or could it be that fate chose to intervene?

I would be remiss if I did not mention that Adrian Neal recalls playing The Weapon, a PBM game from a company called 4 Sight, and that it was very technical, but great fun. Marty Collins, however, remembers playing a PBM game called HyperXpansion, which he said was a very technical game, a bit like Beyond the Stellar Empire.

PBMer Tee Stoney has let me know that he has large stacks of both the UK and US editions of the PBM magazine, Flagship magazine. Someone from the Wisbech Town Council Facebook account, however, has **all** of the back issues of Flagship magazine.

Rick Buda, the former editor of the Nuts and Bolts of Gaming, a PBM magazine from a few years back, didn't hesitate to let me know that he loves Starweb, and that he would like to play a game of Starweb under the moniker NABOG. Before too much longer, I suspect that he will end up realizing this PBM fantasy. Starweb die-hards may perhaps remember Rick by his old Starweb moniker, Kyr, who played a Berserker whose prime directive was to purge the web of life. I can't help but to wonder whether Kyr got carried away and perhaps purged the Nuts and Bolts of Gaming magazine of life, also. Any Starweb players out there that that feel up to teaching Rick Buda a lesson?

And Robert Hayes, the creator and GM of an old PBM game called Cluster, which was run by a PBM company called Capitol Consulting/VRL, Inc., proclaimed that he was not hiding from his legion of fans. Thus, his photo is now up on the PBM Wiki, if you dare to

venture forth and look for it.

Meanwhile, Andrew Hawley wants to know if anyone remembers a PBM game called Dogfight? He played it a long time ago, and loved it! Tony Roberts, though, remembers several PBM games run by DMC Games (ran by Dave Cooksey), including Hunting, Hunting 2, and Psyche. Just to show you how big that PBM gaming was, back in the day, I had already compiled a list of well over three hundred PBM companies, yet I had not heard of any of these particular PBM games. This is a good example of why it is important for everyone to chime in, that we might get those old PBM memories flowing. The river of memories can help restore life all across the vast plain of PBM gaming. Even though individual PBM companies may go out of business, and even though individual PBM games may, indeed, die off, that's not the same thing as PBM, itself, being dead.

Make no mistake, not only is PBM not dead, quite to the contrary, it remains very much alive - *albeit with a reduced footprint due to the current absence of a large number of former PBM companies and PBM games that collectively formed many of our earliest memories of play by mail gaming.*

Walter van Vliet remembers playing Knights of the Avalon, a fantasy PBM game from a PBM company called Jade Games. He played it in the Netherlands, where he met a lot of players, made some great friends, and was left with some really good memories. Jon Hughes also remembers playing it around 1988 or 1989, describing it as very well run by Jade Games, which led him to also try their sci-fi game called Shattered World. "Ah, happy times!" Jon said.

Colin Forbes-Cruse, whom Flagship magazine readers will no doubt remember, has declared that he'll have a go at writing an article for Suspense & Decision magazine. Ira Gossett, a true die-hard of PBM, sent in an article for this very issue, in fact. Everything worth saying about PBM hasn't been said, yet, so grab your pen or your keyboard, and start working on an article or some commentary of your own, so that future issues of Suspense & Decision magazine will be fat from the drippings of your thoughts about the subject of play by mail gaming.

David Shirley feels that Alamaze has gotten so cliquish, that it is impossible for a new player to get in. Mat Hillman chimed in to lament that he had found KJC Games rather unresponsive, lately, commenting that he tried to sign up for It's A Crime on their website. However, Mat is impressed with Flying Buffalo's customer service, so far, declaring it

to be top notch.

It is important to keep in mind that the history of PBM gaming is replete with both praise and criticism. Human opinion runs the gamut from one extreme to the other. No PBM company is perfect, and there is always room for improvement. It is not my role, nor the role of this magazine, to be an apologist for the PBM industry. In my day, I have authored many a criticism of a lot of different things associated with PBM, PBM games, and PBM companies. For years on end, I have scoured the Internet for all things PBM-related, both the good and the bad, and through this PBM magazine, there must be coverage of both praise and criticism, if our endeavor is to have any degree of validity, at all.

Slip-ups happen. Shortcomings occur. Sometimes, things fall between the cracks. Mistakes are a reality of everyday life. None of us wear halos. Even the best laid plans of mice and men go astray! One need venture no further than this very magazine to attest to that.

Look at how many times that Suspense & Decision has dropped the ball. Whose fault is it? Mine and mine, alone. Forget about all of the issues that we have published, for a moment, and think, instead, about all of the issues that could already have been, but which have yet to materialize. How many times has S&D, as it is known to many by now, fallen off a cliff? How many issues have been late? What's the matter? I can't even take my own magazine - our own magazine - to task for its failures? I can and I will.

And I should.


Do I think for even a minute that Mica Goldstone and KJC Games want to lose a potential gaming customer to Flying Buffalo, Inc.? Nope! Is it possible that they didn't receive a communication sent? Positively! Long time PBMer Ira Gossett sent me an article for this issue via e-mail. I receive e-mail via that very same e-mail account on a near-daily basis, sometimes multiple times per day. Yet, did Ira's article sent to me ever show up in my in-box? Not yet, it hasn't. Why? God only knows, because I haven't got a clue. He re-sent it to another e-mail address of mine, and I received it. Go figure! It wasn't in my spam box, and it wasn't in the electronic trash. Rather, it's out there, somewhere, lost in Cyberspace.

As for cliques developing within gaming communities of players, does that ever happen? Yep! Yet, do I think that Rick McDowell, the proprietor of Alamaze, doesn't want Alamaze to be played by a wide

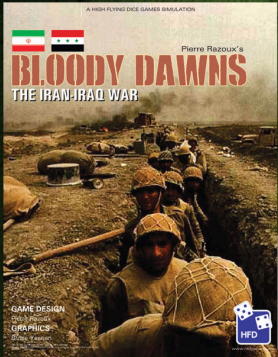
and diverse array of gamers? Nope, not at all! There is probably no PBM company owner that I have exchanged more e-mails with than Rick McDowell over the last decade or more. It hasn't all been flowery words. I am opinionated. Rick is opinionated. We have different perspectives, much like David Shirley has his perspective about Alamaze having become cliquish. Maybe it has. Maybe it hasn't. Maybe other PBM games have become cliquish. Maybe none have. It doesn't strike me as being a particularly new kind of criticism by a player about a given game. Am I wrong about this?

One of the best things that you could do for PBM would be to write in and give me a piece of your mind, whether on these topics or any other. If you do, then our next issue may yet prove to be our best issue ever. Suspense & Decision - *Help spread the word!*

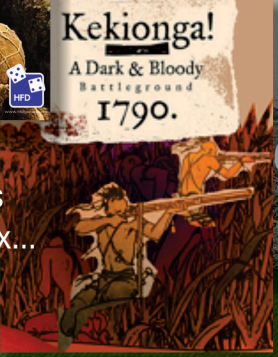

And if you haven't already done so, yet, be sure to [subscribe now](#) to our PBM mailing list. The future of PBM could use your participation!




**HIGH FLYING
DICE GAMES, LLC**




From designs by noted authors like Pierre Razoux...

to graphics by outstanding artists like Ilya Kudriashov, Nils Johansson, Antonio Pinar Peña and others...



to updated, modified and improved editions from long time designers...



to one of a kind games for fun family entertainment.

www.hfdgames.com

With over 50 releases and several **NEW** professional editions High Flying Dice Games titles span all eras of history with interesting and unique design concepts.

PBM Report Card

A

You can grade this magazine.

B

You can grade PBM companies.

C

You can grade individual games.

Send in your report card, today!

D

It's faster than writing an article.

F

Anyone can do it.

Even you!

**Send PBM report cards to:
playbymail.net@gmail.com**

RED MENACE

WW III in 1959

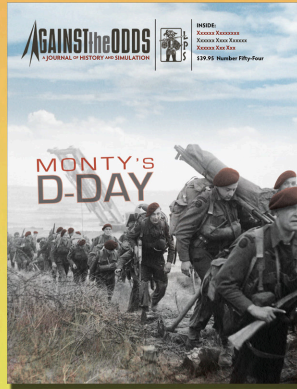


Available in print at TheGameCrafter.com
and download at WargameVault.com

IN THE NEXT YEAR OF
AGAINSTtheODDS

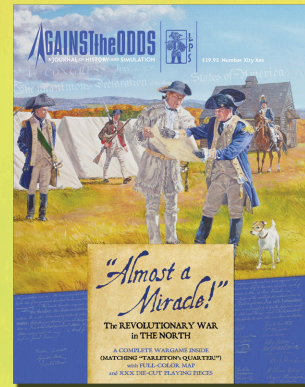
ATOMAGAZINE.COM

MONTY'S D-DAY



(LINK-UP GAME TO
BRADLEY'S D-DAY)

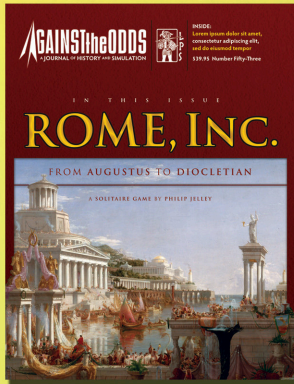
"ALMOST A MIRACLE!"



(LINK-UP
GAME TO
"TARLETON'S
QUARTER!")

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR
IN THE NORTH

ROME, INC.



FROM AUGUSTUS
TO DIOCLETIAN

OPERATION ICHI-GO



JAPAN'S MASSIVE 1944
OFFENSIVE ACROSS CHINA

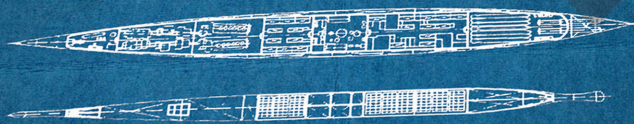
FIRST STRIKE!
The Cuxhaven Raid
Christmas Day 1914

DESIGNER | Paul Rohrbaugh

IRON and FIRE
The Peruvian Ironclad *Huáscar*
in the 1879 Pacific War

DESIGNER | Paul Rohrbaugh

ALSO GET THE 2018 ANNUAL, SEA MONSTERS!
AT UP TO 40% OFF THE COVER PRICE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE AT THE SAME TIME!



XXI
The Naval Wunderwaffe
1943-1945

DESIGNER | Steven Cunliffe



UNDER TEN FLAGS
Hunting the Raider *Atlantis*
1939-1941

DESIGNER | Paul Stuhlfaut

“Lightning” Galac-Tac

A Retrospective

Davin Church

Back in the old days of Galac-Tac, when it was still being played by postal mail, my friends and I played an interesting variant of it.

We were all experienced players, and we all had our own styles of play that we were used to. Therefore, creating our turns for Galac-Tac typically took only a short time (if we avoided deep strategy and didn't mind occasional optimization imperfections). We thought perhaps we could have some fun with Galac-Tac without waiting for the required two weeks mail turnaround between turns.

So, we all decided to get together in the same place one Saturday morning to play Galac-Tac in real time (and perforce in person)! We chose a time limit of about 15 minutes for writing up each turn (which we called “lightning rounds”), after which we would type it directly into the old computer ourselves (an original IBM PC!) and the GM would process the turns as soon as we were all entered.

In those days, processing and printing the turns took

significantly longer than on today's systems, so we all had some time each turn to plan, talk amongst ourselves, make alliances or threats as appropriate, and have some snacks while the turns printed. Then we all leapt back into the turns while they were still (almost literally) hot off the printer and the ink was still drying.

The usual eager anticipation of the bi-weekly turn report, with its tasty adrenaline rush, became an all-day high, with whoops and groans as the various dramas unfolded.

We were well into the end-game by late that evening, and the few of us left alive stayed up until someone was the obvious winner. Back then we were much younger and could pull all-nighters. These days it's hard enough to pull an all-dayer. But I digress...

We could have broken up and continued the next day (or at some later date), but getting several people together isn't that easy to schedule. Running through a complete game and declaring a winner in a far

shorter time than it would traditionally take was great fun and gave us a real sense of accomplishment. (We did try again a couple of times after that, but it generally took longer to get through and we had less contiguous time available.)

It was amazing to see how brutal the games could get, with close cooperation between allies ganging up on enemies to put them out of the game earlier than was typical. Winners were declared far sooner this way and everyone had a great time.

Of course, now that order entry and reporting can be done online, players don't have to all be physically present to participate, but part of the fun was the direct human

interaction among friends ... a far too rare occurrence in today's MMORPG world.

I'd love to do something like this

again, if only we had enough interested people with enough time available at once. Anybody around here up for a game?

GALAC-TAC
 Make new friends!
 Make new enemies!
www.talisman-games.com

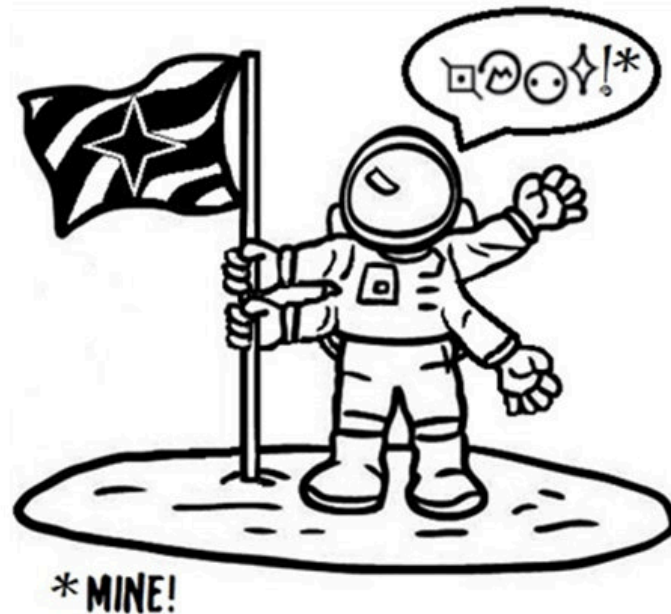
www.talisman-games.com

grognard.com
 the site for wargames
 on the web since 1995




GALAC-TAC

A CLASSIC GAME OF SPACE CONQUEST



You start off with a simple map – “You are here” – and a small fleet of ships provided to begin exploring and exploiting the region around you. From there... design and build ships, claim neighboring stars and collect their resources, encounter other empires, and strive to take top place in the galaxy, as all the expanding civilizations compete for the prize. Soon all those flags are planted, unclaimed stars become scarce, and the new task becomes maintaining your hold on your own territory while creating the fleets to take what you want from those who are weaker... or less wily. All the fun of the classic 1982 PBM game without the postage! Enter orders and retrieve turn reports on the web, and use the GTac Assistant to help you create and proof-read orders, view interactive customizable maps, design your vessels, and keep detailed history handy. Single-player games can help you learn the system and try out new strategies at your own pace. Then take on human players in a battle for galactic supremacy!

www.talisman-games.com

Payments accepted via PayPal, credit or debit card, or check.

Just \$5/mo for all the Galac-Tac games you can play! (Other games are under development)

For a limited time, 12 free bonus months after your first paid month.

Something Else Entirely!

The Arch Necromancer speaks on PBM Games

Vince L. Falcone

I have waged wars across all kinds of platforms; I have played solo missions against endless hordes of villains and monsters only to end up fighting their super-inflated 'Level Boss'. I have played MMOs and fought

everything from intergalactic wars to first person shooters in a dozen cities across a dozen countries even on a dozen worlds. I have lead armies across maps and rolled the dice that would determine my fate and the fate of the world on more occasions than can be remembered.

And that is my point. I cannot remember in great detail a single one of those 'glorious battles'. Oh sure, I may recall a particular shot I made, or a kill I landed, but it ends there. Forgotten, along with the rest of the things that just don't

warrant memory. My guess is because the image was overlaid onto my brain, and no real thought or energy was expended on my part. It was simply a manufactured memory; and like all things

"But then, like the kings of old, or an anxious general waiting for news from his scouts, my PBM turn arrives in the mail! This is something else entirely! This is what I have been waiting for all these weeks – news from the front! Word of deeds back home at court or in faraway kingdoms."

manufactured – they aren't built to last. Because it's a computer driven game, with brilliant lights, and fancy sounds backed up with a slick soundtrack. None of it is mine. Not the look, not the feel, not even the playing of it. Its all generated to

stimulate. No real effort required on my part.

But then, like the kings of old, or an anxious general waiting for news from his scouts, my PBM turn arrives in the mail! This is something else entirely! This is what I have been waiting for all these weeks – news from the front! Word of deeds back

home at court or in faraway kingdoms.

I eagerly open my turn, and it reads as if my own vizier were before me, transporting me to where I need to be. And, just like the kings and queens of a forgotten time, I have numerous decisions to make – *dozens of decrees that will either seal the pacts of alliance, or send thousands to their death in glorious battle.*

Mine is the power to command spies to inform me of my neighbor's activities, send assassins to silence forever a troublesome diplomat, or order my generals and heroes to war for the greater good of the realm. Wizards are summoned to work their arcane magics and summon powers in the service of their king that go beyond the scope of mere mortals.

Armies are hurled at my enemy's frontiers, and garrisons are reinforced to defend against hostile raiding parties. Treaties are made and broken, tributes demanded, and gifts of jewels, spices and gold are sent to entice

prospective allies, or hire the talents of distant nations to do those deeds that cannot be associated with the crown.

And while all of this is enough to stir the imagination, and keeps the piston's of my mind firing endlessly; turning various options in my head over and over and over again, this is still not the end... the greatest aspect of the game has yet to unfold itself...



Hyborian War™ by RSI

www.reality.com

Your turns are submitted and received via the mail, but so too is the greatest feature of the PBM system... the interaction with players from all over the world. Why should your kingdom wage war alone, when you can write to another and strike up an alliance, or forge a peace treaty? The power to communicate with players from all walks of life, from every corner of the map who are all here with a singular purpose – *the same purpose as yours* – the conquest of a realm!

It is interesting to note, that many of the players will interact 'in character,' adding to the flavor of the already sumptuous game. Knowing that there are other kings and queens contacting, and waiting to be contacted only adds to the fun. In time, real life friendships will arise, and where once a floundering alliance may have existed, talks of a second game with even greater cooperation may begin, and so the wheel continues to spin... and it is a war without end... the kingdoms you play may change, as will the allies and enemies you may have, but the adventure will always be there, and the memories from each war will last a lifetime. The victories will burn brightly in your recollection, and your defeats will gnaw at you for a chance at revenge – but the two greatest things you will take away from your PBM games will always be:

the friends in unexpected places you have made, and the memories of the adventures and wars you have journeyed through together.

The time is now, 'O king. Will you heed the call, and partake in the greatest of adventures, or will you sit by and listen to the tales of the courage of others?

* Editor's Note *

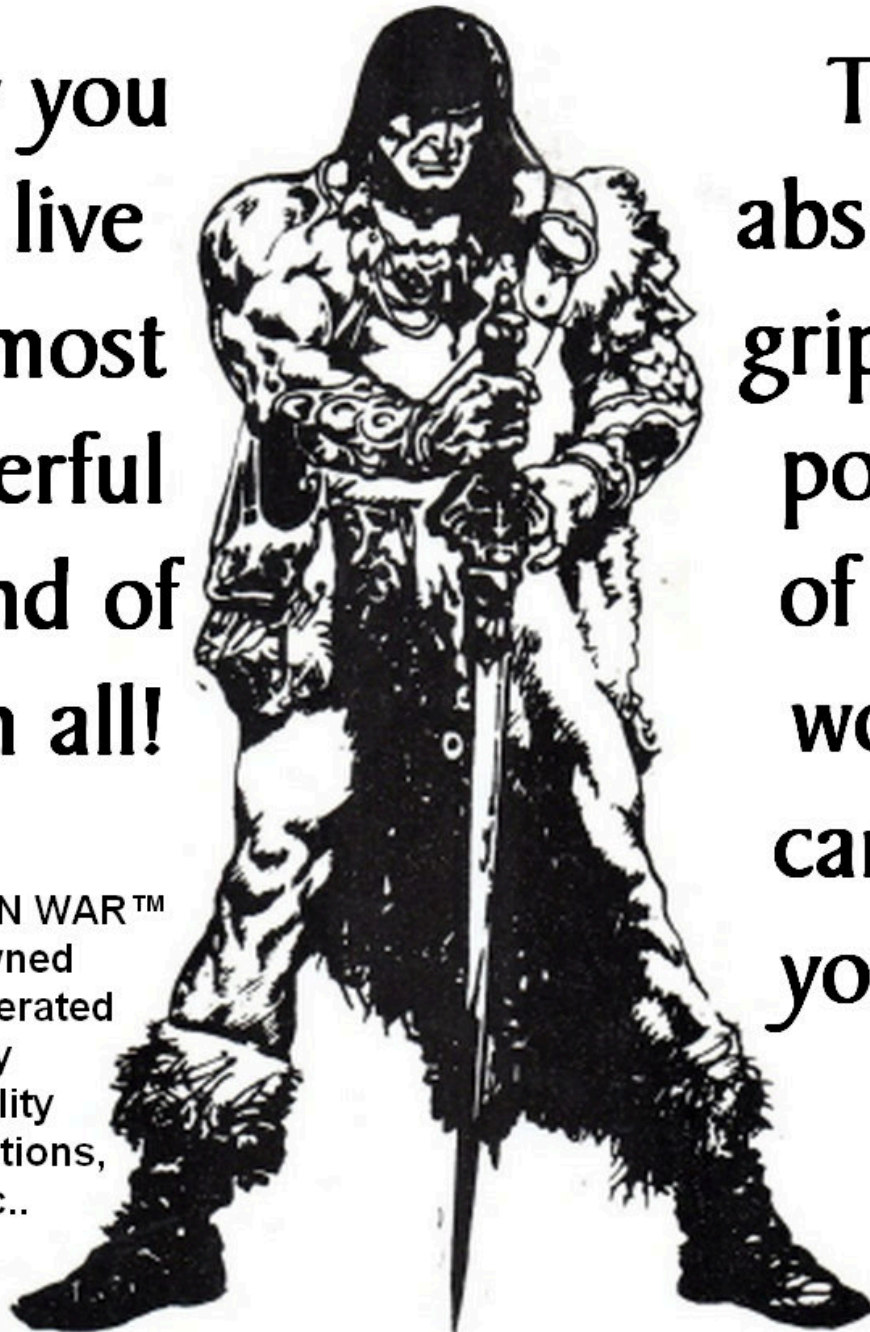
Vince L. Falcone can be found in the Road of Kings forum breathing life into his alter ego, the Arch Necromancer of Hyperborea known by the dread name of Mindox Sul.

www.warbarron.com



HYBORIAN WAR

Now you
can live
the most
powerful
legend of
them all!



The
absolute
gripping
power
of this
world
can be
yours.

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

www.reality.com

© 1985 Conan Properties, Inc. All rights reserved. Trademarks of Conan Properties, Inc.

NOW AVAILABLE FOR ORDER!

STALINGRAD

VERDUN ON THE VOLGA

A LAST STAND GAME



LASTSTANDGAMES.COM

GAME DESIGN BY MICHAEL RINELLA
DEVELOPMENT DONALD JOHNSON
GRAPHICS MARK MAHAFFEY



STALINGRAD

VERDUN ON THE VOLGA

HISTORICAL NOTES



PRELUDE: THE ADVANCE TO THE VOLGA
by Michael A. Rinella

THE BATTLE IN STALINGRAD
by David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House

AFTERMATH: THE DEATH OF SIXTH ARMY

STALINGRAD

VERDUN ON THE VOLGA

RULES OF PLAY

STALINGRAD

Currently Available From Bounding Fire Productions



BFP brings you the very best in ASL

AVAILABLE FROM US AT www.boundingfire.com OR DIRECTLY FROM LFT AT www.lefranctireur.org

Ridin' Out the Storm

A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 8

Douglas Neman

Weather Report: 3500-08

Colonizer 4's route back to the homeworld would almost take it through the same systems Rex and I scouted on the way out. We set out immediately, leaving the colonizers from Still Standing and Heart of Fire behind to glare at each other.

I sat by the window, looking out into the empty blackness of space, trying hard not to see it as a metaphor for my life. Since I was literally looking at the entire universe, I'm pretty sure I failed.

Rex, lying on his bunk, said, "I've been thinking."

"That's your first mistake."

"CC sent us in a straight line as far as possible from the homeworld. No one else, just us. We hit three systems. We never charted the third because we never got a chance, and that system was *52 sectors* away! That system's practically on the Heart of Fire's front porch, and there are over 30 systems closer to our homeworld than that one. But CC sent a colonizer straight to that system *anyway*, with *no*

protection, and with *no survey data*. Why?!"

I shrugged. "They're stupid?"

"No. Well, yes, they are, but not like that." Rex shook his head. "Any colony we set up there would be destroyed before they could take their first shower. CC knows that. Ergo, they never intended to colonize that system in the first place."

"Snot-Nose wants colonies like a baby wants candy," I said scornfully. "That makes colonizers precious assets, and there are over a hundred people aboard this ship. There's *no way* CC would ever pull this ship off colonization duties and send it 52 sectors into the unknown for the sole purpose of bringing home a couple of privates."

"I agree. But that's exactly what they did."

I wanted so badly to tell him he was wrong, but I had nothing.

I said, "Admiral Brighton's daughter must have fallen in love with me and pleaded for my return."

"Are you competing with CC for the Stupid Award?"

"When all other explanations have been eliminated, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the answer."

"We haven't eliminated all other explanations. We just don't have enough information. There's a difference."

"But my explanation is a happy one."

"Which is why it can't possibly be true."

The intercom buzzed. "Storm. Callahan. Get your butts to the bridge."

I gave a weary salute to the speaker, and Rex and I obeyed. Thirty seconds later we were on the bridge, at attention in front of the commander, who seemed to like us less than he did the first time. Which is impressive. The support crew manning their stations studiously ignored us.

"Our orders have changed," the commander said. "We're to rendezvous with the *Starfall* in the next system. The *Starfall* is our newest and best destroyer, and both of you will transfer aboard to become ships' cooks!" He glared at us with a face that could have made stars go nova. "I don't know whose ass you kissed, or who you're blackmailing, but I have never

had a worse assignment than carting you two babies to your safe, cushy little job!"

"Feeling's mutual, sir," I said. "I'd rather be back on our scout ship, myself, instead of on this dump truck." I at least had the decency to remain at attention and continue staring straight ahead as I said it.

Everyone froze. Beside me, I knew Rex was successfully fighting back a grin.

The commander slowly stood and put his face inches from mine. "Is that so, private?" he whispered. "Are you so sure about that?"

I squinted. Something about his eyes told me not to answer that.

"Your precious scout ship was destroyed two hours ago," he whispered. "Two good men just died in your place, and I will never know why. Now. Get. Off. My. Bridge!"

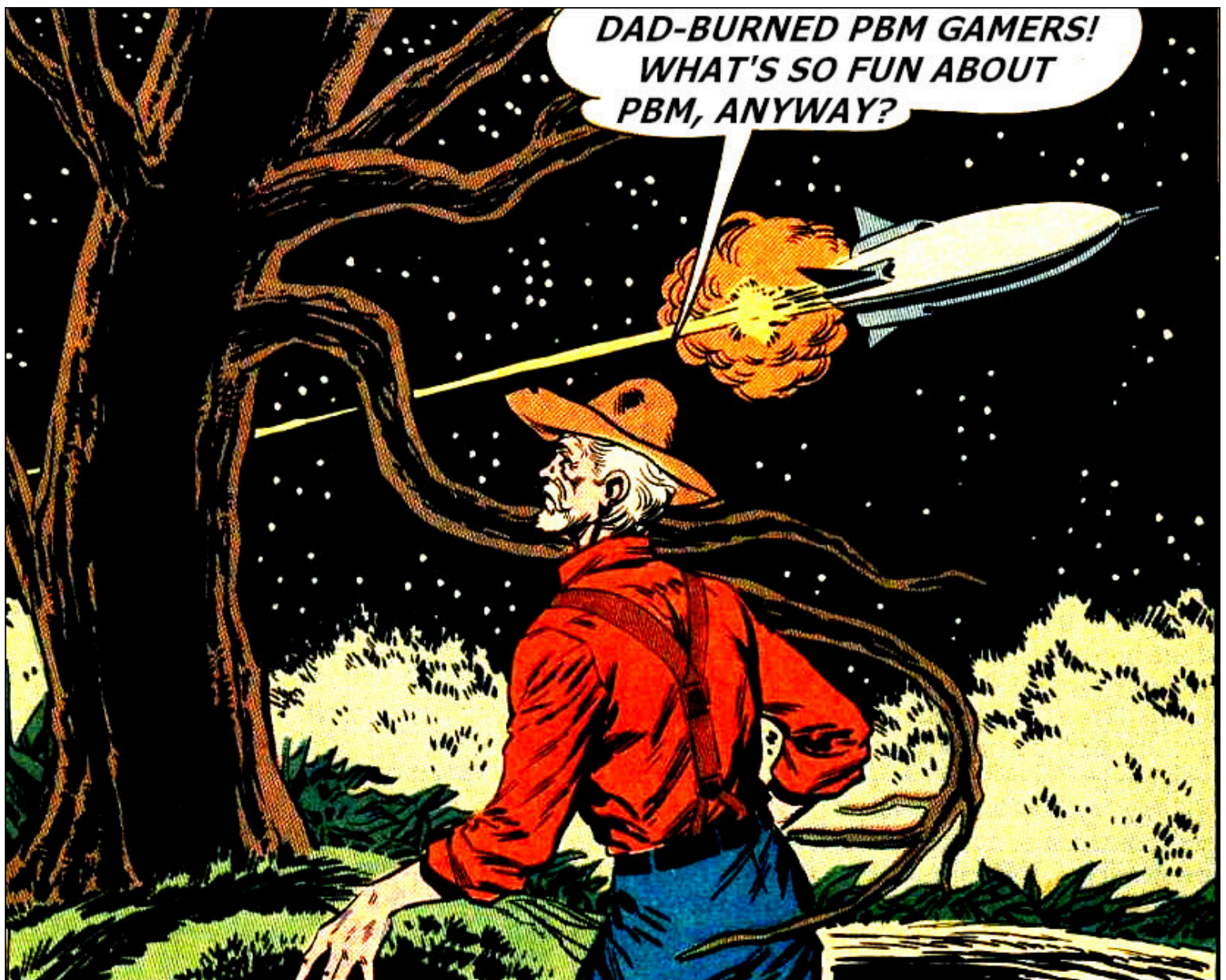
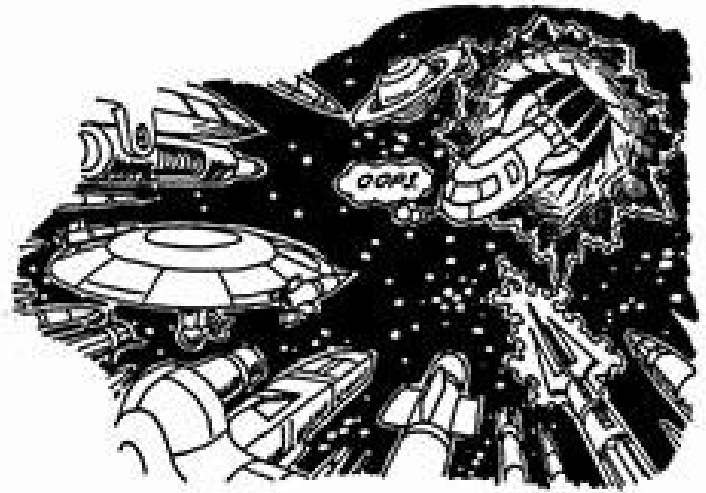
Rex and I solemnly saluted and left. If the commander's objective had been to crush my insubordination, he had done a superb job.

We returned to our quarters and resumed the same positions we were in before. I stared out the window. Rex stared at the ceiling. We both felt about as tall as microbes.

"You're right," I finally said, watching my reflection in the window. "We don't have enough information."

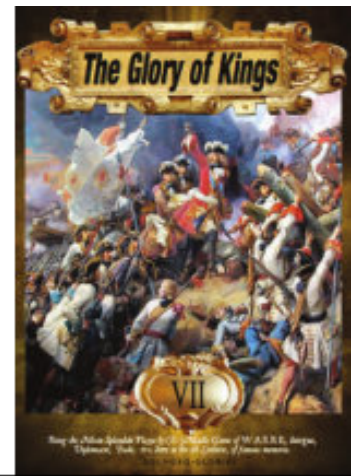
I turned to face Rex. "The commander is also right. He'll never know why we were transferred. But we will. We will find out."

Rex nodded, his face and his heart as set as mine.



The Face of PBM





The sun arose on a green but windswept ridge overlooking a verdant valley dotted by trees and dusty tracks. All was peaceful, save for birdsong. The keen-eyed amongst us would have seen white-coated troops snaking across a bridge in column, while outriders spread out before them, keeping a watch out for observers.

The Marquis, standing on the ridge, snapped shut his eyeglass and turned to the Duke of Anjou. "Your grace, the Austrians are forcing the frontier in some strength." Anjou smiled grimly. "Then we shall give them a hot reception. Order the army to deploy, if you would be so kind."

Drums began to rattle and roll, and men hurried to form line while cannon were brought forward.

Ominously, the bird song had ceased...

The Glory of Kings is set in the days of the 18th century, with one game turn representing a month and players taking on a variety of roles. Typically you play as the head of a country, for example the King of France, a German prince, or a Chinese or Indian lord. Smaller positions, such as a notorious pirate, can be taken on instead, if you prefer. Each game turn is run approximately once a month in real life, and each turn you receive details of your own position details, hopefully letters from others, and the in-game newspaper. The game has won multiple awards over the years, and is a firm favourite amongst our players.

Standard turns cost £10 each, or £6 each if you prefer to roleplay as a single character in the sister-game Swashbuckler (such characters still play within games of The Glory of Kings).

HOW TO TAKE PART: All you need is access to an email account, and a computer or suchlike in order to send and receive orders. Files are sent to you as PDFs, so anyone can open them, and your turns are sent in to us as word files (doc, docx, or rtf, for example; in fact we can cope with most text files). If you prefer, and live in the U.K., playing via the post is possible instead (a £2 surcharge applies though). The first requirement to take part is to get the rules. They are available on our website www.agema.org.uk

Nothing else needs to be done at this stage. With the rules, you'll receive a list of positions currently available, and instructions on what to do next. The rules are deliberately cheap, in order to get potential players to take a look. Please note that you are not tied into anything, and you can join or leave a game of The Glory of Kings any time you like! Thanks for reading, and we hope you decide to take the plunge and join us in this epic award-winning game!



Memories of Games Past

The PBM Saga of Ira Gossett

Ira Lee Gossett

I started my gaming life back in 1973, when I received my first issue of Strategy & Tactics magazine. For the next 5 years, I was strictly a wargamer, but I kept seeing these Schubel & Son ads in later issues about play by mail games. So in 1978, after I reported to my first ship stationed in Japan, I wrote to Schubel & Son's concerning their game, Tribes of Crane.

After getting my reply, I quickly bought a money order, filled out the paper work needed and I was off on my PBM adventure. I played Tribes of Crane heavy for the next 3 years, eventually running four tribes, getting a friend involved who ended up running three tribes and creating our own alliance; The Gwyneddian Council.

Tribes of Crane was where I also got my start in writing stories, as I would write about what the Gwyneddian Council and our tribes were up to for the game's newsletter in story format.

I also started to expand my reading material towards the end with Sorcerer's Apprentice, Flagship and PBM Universal

magazines. Reading about all the different PBM games out there got me to trying out other games.

Since I was reading about games and it just seemed to go hand-in-hand with it, I started writing short stories about the games I was playing in.

They've shown up in newsletters, fanzines (Yea! My first paid story, \$5.00!) and on various sites on the web. I've done stories from my PBM & PBeM games, single player and MMO computer games and a detective story inspired by the RPG 'Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes'.

Around 1982, not only did I transfer to a new ship: breaking up our war group, but Tribes of Crane started slowing down, eventually the game stopped either in 1983 or 1984. While sad to put it behind me, that just got me to send for other games.

- A fantasy game, that more than once went soft porn for the two of us playing it. While there might have been more, it was just interesting that the DM tossed us together and ran us

as a group. Pretty standard fantasy game, we were humans and our big moment was going into a cave system to rescue Elven princesses. Let's just say they were very appreciative of our rescuing them.

- A 3D space game where you commanded a single ship. The map was supplied, and you had to do the math to head to the different planets and systems. Only played it for maybe a year, and nothing really happened in it, but I enjoyed working out the math and wrote a short story based off the game.

- Heroic Fantasy from Flying Buffalo. I had read the Heroic Fantasy stories in the early Sorcerer's Apprentice magazines, and always wanted to try it. I ended up trying it twice, and while the concept is great; your typical dungeon crawl, I came away disappointed, both times. Instead of the dungeon rooms repopulating, they were empty. Picked clean by the players that had come before me. My turns consisted of just moving from room to room, trying to catch up to the pack.

Rick was really nice about it, he even kept a \$2.00 credit I had on my first account and brought it up to me a couple of years later, when I came back to try it, again.

- One of the GM's running a game I was in (the fantasy game, most likely) wanted to try out a new game idea on this other player and myself. It would be a 'Joe Friday' type detective game. We were given 5 cases to work on, the concept being which of us could solve the cases before the other. It was totally free form, and we could work on whichever case we wanted to, in whatever order. Visit the scene, ask questions etc.... Sadly, it only lasted a couple of turns, before he dropped the idea.

That took me up to around 1988, when I kept reading about, but stopped playing games. I now had a wife, a new baby and paying for all those turns was starting to add up, so I ended up taking a break for the next 12 years. Then came about this thing called a 'computer', which entered into my life and I started wandering the web and somehow stumbled upon a listing of all kinds of PBEM Games. Here before my eyes were pages and pages of all kinds of Play by Mail and Play by Email games, now to find one I liked.

After wandering through the various games, I finally settled on a WWII tactical game; Ritterkreuz. My first Play by Email game. The GM had created a Yahoo group, and we posted all our information there.

Backgrounds, turns, questions etc....

You played as a German soldier attached to a motorcycle reconnaissance command. I showed up right after Germany had invaded Poland, and continued to play through the invasion of the Netherlands. The GM (who, it turned out, was a Polish lady in college) had us create very detailed backgrounds for our characters; age, where born, likes, dislikes, hobbies and vices, and very much encouraged us to role play our characters within the guidelines we had created.

Wonderful game, and very enjoyable inter-acting with the other players. She was a bit weak on the whole military tactic's part, so most of the action was of the 'hey diddle diddle, straight up the middle we go' variety, but all of us playing loved military history, so there were plenty of side discussions on the period, equipment and things.

Once again, Real Life reared it's ugly head, and she had to concentrate on her college classes, and so the game ended.

Back to the pages of the PBEM List, and I settled on one called Pride and Glory, which was a single player game within the long running Fields of Glory game. Once again, it was time

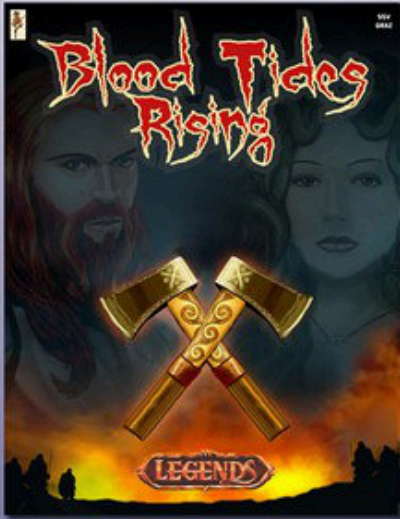
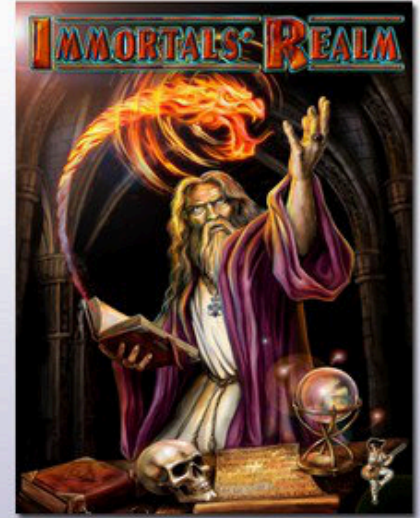
to create an elaborate back story. Sadly, this one only ran a few short turns. Long enough for me to get funding from the French to harass the English in Ireland, and squander all the money, thus disappointing my patron, and getting me a swift kick in the behind from him! Fun while it lasted.

I even created my own play by email game; Napoleon's Bleeding Ulcer, my take on the game 'Sharp Practice' by Too Fat Lardies. Ran for half a dozen turns before I just couldn't keep it going due to health problems. The few players I had said they all really liked it, and were sorry to see it end.

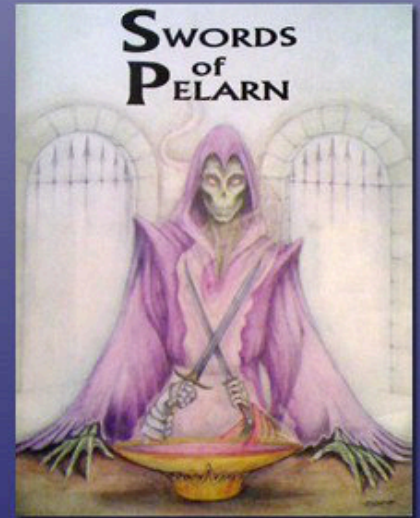
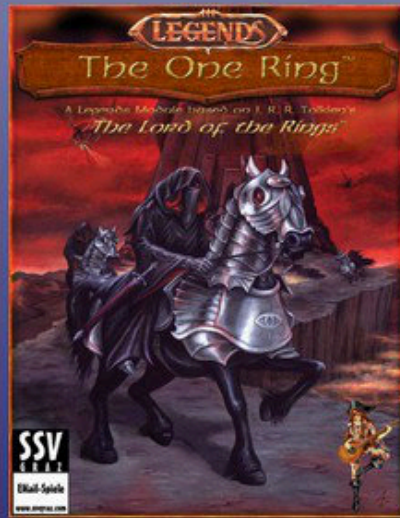
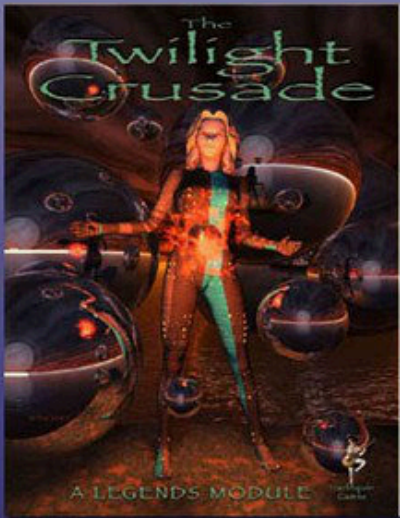
Since then, I have pretty much stopped my general gaming, and have just played off and on a fantasy game called Tunnels & Trolls; a simpler and much more tongue-in-cheek version of Dungeon's & Dragon's.

I've been involved in 2 campaigns in a Yahoo Group called the 'Blue Frog Tavern'. A couple of dungeon runs run on the 'Vin's T&T TrollBridge' site, and once via a Facebook T&T group.

I still visit Lindahl's PBEM page looking for new games I might want to play, and I'm sure I'll find another one, somewhere down the road.



vibrant original worlds
that stretch the limits
of imagination and
possibility



www.harlequingames.com

WILL THE SHIP LIFT OFF WITHOUT YOU?

**I'VE GOT TO GET ON THAT
NEW PBM SUBSCRIBER LIST!**



the **Islander**

Newsletter for The Isles PBM

Issue 9 August 2019

**Can you handle
the excitement?**

SIGN UP TO PLAY

**COMPANY
COMMANDER**

**RAT-TA-TA-
TA-TAT!**



EDITOR'S NOTE: Many images in Suspense & Decision are clickable! Give it a try!

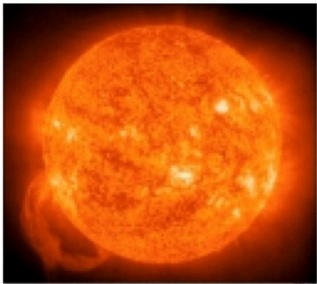
SUPERNOVA

Sixteen Gorb'ton Assault Battlecruisers and a dozen Frigates materialized in the Proxima star system. Fifty-four Thallani Federation Heavy Drone Cruisers flanked by eight awesome Base Stations pounded the Gorb'ton ships with withering fire, but two of the Battlecruisers managed to survive and their shields and defensive systems came fully on-line. Six of the Thallani Cruisers were vaporized by Gorb'ton Fusion Blasters while Thallani drones swarmed about the warp point. Another wave of Gorb'ton ships popped in, but this time two of the dreaded mobile Monitors were in their midst. Four Thallani Base Stations, bristling with X-Ray Lasers and towed to the Warp Point to provide short range firepower, disappeared under massive Gorb'ton Fusion Blaster fire. Their Drone Cruisers' shields were never designed to withstand this much firepower, and twenty were incinerated as their very atoms were induced to begin irreversible nuclear chain reactions. The Thallanians had never heard of Phase Inverter technology, and suffered dearly for this shortfall, while the Gorb'ton ships were agile and outfitted with special armor coatings to counter the known Thallani weapons. More Gorb'ton ships poured into the system, and the Thallani crews knew they were doomed. Their commander ordered his ships to concentrate on the Frigates and other enemy screening vessels, hoping to take down as many as possible before his command crumbled. The rest of the Thallani force went code Omega and were blown into oblivion as the remainder of the Gorb'ton Autocracy 52nd Greater Claw Task Force rumbled through the warp tunnel. Soon the hated Thallanians would be ground under scaly Gorb'ton tentacles, glorifying the rule of His Majesty, Ur-Lord Kabm'ta....

AN EPIC NEVER-ENDING STRATEGIC SCALE SPACE POWER GAME

Supernova is an interactive game of galactic conquest, colonization and exploration. Rolling Thunder Games moderates SN:ROTE using a computer network for data storage, order processing, combat resolution and a host of other game-related features. As a player, you choose your own objectives, interact with an unlimited number of other players and control your own destiny. You will construct mighty warfleets, colonize entire worlds, explore the galaxy in search of the unknown. Encounter rock-throwing primitives...and Elder Races. We provide a playing environment of incredible detail, diversity and flexibility, with a complete space fantasy environment featuring detailed planets, diverse lifeforms and numerous unknown elements that wait to be discovered.

HERE'S A TINY SAMPLING OF SUPERNOVA'S INCREDIBLE DETAIL

Supergiants, Black Holes, Cepheid Variables, X-Ray Binaries, Pulsars	Orbital bombardment	Gauss Guns, Plasma Torpedoes, Siege Lasers, Spinal Rail Guns, Needlers	Fantastically detailed ship design	Design your lifeform as if you had controlled its evolution
Ion Storms, Temporal Rifts, Plasma Clouds, Solar Flares, Unstable Space	Iron, Timber, Petrochemicals, Gaseous Elements, Gemstones		Hydrogen Clouds, Dark Nebulae, Dust Storms, Asteroids, Weak Space	Standing orders
Warp point assaults				Living Wave Assault, NBC Strike, Recon in Force, Aerial Bombardment
Command unlimited number of Fleets and Ships				Legendary Characters
Nuclear Release, Ready Reserve, Counterattack, Delaying Action, Fortify				Close Combat, Artillery, Subterranean fighting, Heavy Armor
Mass Destruction Devices	Thousands of high technology items to research		Crystal Forests, Glaciers, Tundra, Deserts, Forested Swamps, Salt Flats, Jungles	Diplomacy, exploration, industrialization, trade, colonization
Field Stabilizers, Meson Webs, Tachyon Grids, Thermal Regulators	Cool program to enter your turn orders – send and receive turns by email	Rules and entry program FREE to download from our web site	Imperial Tradition	Minelayers, Tugs, Drone Cruisers, Carriers, Tankers, Privateers, Battleships

RISE OF THE EMPIRE

BLAST OTHER EMPIRES INTO RADIOACTIVE RUIN

...or peacefully coexist by forming a galaxy-spanning alliance. Will you work with other players to forge a new beginning? Or build an unstoppable armada to sweep them into oblivion? The tools are there. The limitless possibilities of Supernova allow you to use your imagination and choose your own destiny.

WHAT IS THE PLAYER'S ROLE?

Each player represents the leader of a world of beings that is just now reaching out to the stars. The various nations or factions present on your homeworld for countless generations have united under your rule, and you alone control the destiny of your civilization. Countless other players from all around the world are also directing their Empires to explore the stars and make names for themselves. Some may live near you, in other states, or even in other countries. Many of these players will never meet, while others will form alliances, discuss endless strategies by email or phone, fight in titanic battles or simply live in peace. Resources and Items can be exchanged between Empires, allowing for a vibrant trade system that depends only on the needs and desires of the various trading partners. Internally, as leader of your civilization, you will have plenty of economic decisions to make. Will you devote your starting resources to the construction of warfleets with which to conquer your neighbors? Perhaps building up your infrastructure and biding your time until your scientists can develop superior technology would be wise. Colonization and mining of other planets may be something to consider as well. With countless other players making the same decisions, some beginning near your precious homeworld, these decisions are of the utmost importance to the very survival of your Empire. If another player decides to be aggressive and shows up on your doorstep with a warfleet, things could get ugly. It's hard to deny: hammering other Empires back to the Stone Age can be a lot of fun, especially if you'll never have to face that Empire's player in real life. On the other hand, alliances can secure your borders and let every ally grow in peace....

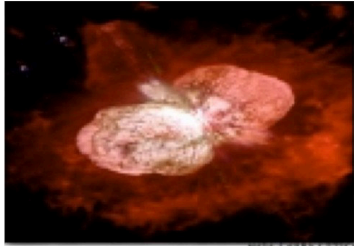
OK, I'M HOOKED! HOW CAN I PLAY THIS GAME?

Rolling Thunder Games, maintains the central computer database and manages every aspect of the game. Players submit orders every two weeks which are then processed by the RTG computers. Results are sent back to the players who then plan their next moves. A lot of diplomacy takes place on the player's end as you confer with allies, threaten enemies and perhaps try to make new friends.

To begin play, all you need to do is fill out the Empire Setup form found at the end of the rules, which can be downloaded for free from www.rollingthunder.com. You'll choose your Empire Name, Imperial Emblem and Imperial Tradition, and will design every aspect of your lifeform. Check out Chapter 11 for more details on the incredible lifeform design system—you can choose to be anything from an Amphibious Cephalopod to a Winged Reptile. Send this in to Rolling Thunder Games along with some funds to get your account started, and during the next processing cycle the RTG gamemasters will get you set up and ready to go. The best way to pay for your turns is to send us \$20.00 or more to get your account started, and then replenish this amount each time you have used up what is in your account. Many players set up their accounts to be replenished automatically via a MasterCard or VISA card; when your account reaches zero dollars, RTG charges your credit card a set amount, so you never have to worry about running out of funds.

CHECK OUT WWW.ROLLINGTHUNDER.COM TO DOWNLOAD THE FREE RULES

You can order a hard copy of the rules directly from Rolling Thunder Games if you like. The cost is \$10.00 and we'll fire off a copy to get you started right away!



Rolling Thunder Games, Inc.
PO Box 460999
Aurora CO 80046-0999
Web Site: www.rollingthunder.com
Email: supernova@rollingthunder.com

What does it cost to play?

Rules are FREE by email, or we'll send you a hard copy for \$10.00

Setups \$15.00

Email Turns \$6.25

GET IN AT THE BEGINNING - S U P E R N O V A - S E P T E M B E R 2 0 0 2

- Countless players from all around the world
- Deep technological advancement
- Detailed ship design
- Naval and ground battles galore
- Exploration, colonization, diplomacy, conquest
- More than 50,000 star systems
- Email play fully supported
- FREE rules download
- *If you've been looking for one whopper of a science fiction strategy game of epic proportions, Supernova is what you've been waiting for!*

Enclosed is \$10.00 – please send me a hard copy of the Rulebook, Orders Supplement and Empire Setup info!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP _____

RTG Account # (or write NEED ACCT) _____

Be More Than a Player

Learning by Teaching in SuperNova & Middle-earth

Raven Zachary

SuperNova is an interactive game of galactic conquest, colonization and exploration. It is an open-ended game so you can join at any time and turns are processed simultaneously every two weeks.

<http://www.rollingthunder.com/>

Joining a play-by-mail game is difficult. The level of effort required learning a new game in the two weeks between when a new player receives their starting turn and when the turn is due can be overwhelming. It's not uncommon for new players to drop before they submit their first turn. The initial excitement is quickly replaced by the intimidation of learning rules under time pressure. One PBM gamemaster told me that for every five players that try his game, one only continues past the first few turns. Think about that for a minute. We'd have a lot more players in this hobby if the process to join and learn a game was easier. Even for those new players that push through the initial learning curve against

the odds, the difficulties don't stop there.

A quick sidebar before continuing: the term *onboarding* is a business term used to describe the process an employee goes through in starting a new job and becoming both comfortable and productive in their new environment, and I use that term throughout this article to describe the process that a new player goes through in joining (and hopefully remaining active with) a PBM game. Improving PBM onboarding is a bit of a personal obsession of mine, and one that I hope to convince other players in this article to embrace.

New players are often joining a game where other players have been involved for decades. There is often a large body of knowledge that these experienced players have collected about the game that exists outside of the rulebooks. If a new player is lucky, they may find a player mentor who is willing to take them under their wing and make the onboarding process easier. If a new player is not so lucky, they may find themselves dropping out of the game due to a lack of available information or a community of existing players that are perceived as adversarial to helping them learn.

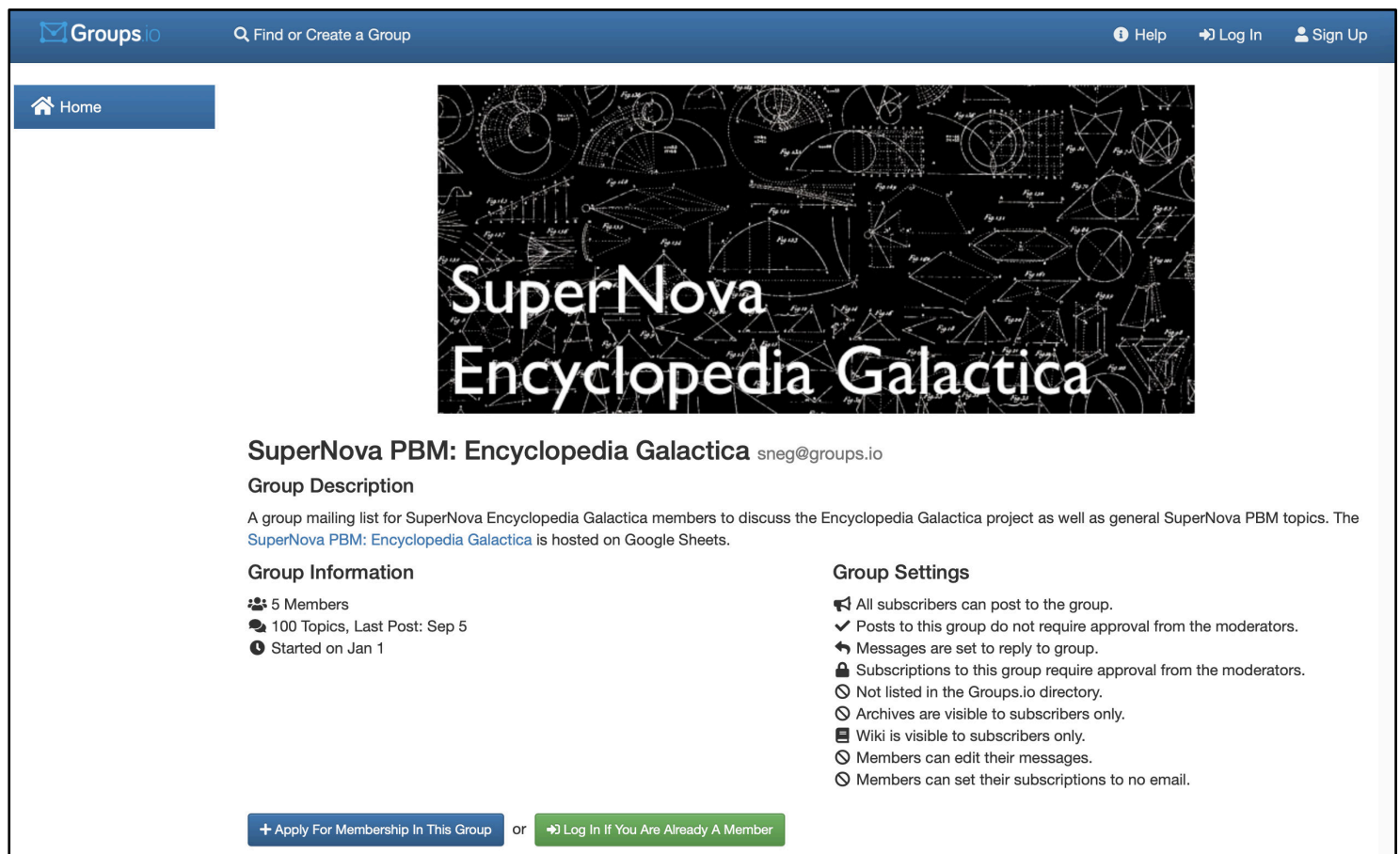
I've heard people complain about this time and time again. New players sometimes feel unable to break into an established and close-knit community or wrap their heads around the indecipherable rules, some of which haven't been updated since the launch of the game in prior decades. We lose a lot of new players due to the challenges of onboarding. Some of these challenges are solvable. There are things that we as players can do to help make onboarding easier for everyone.

Onboarding as a new player generally leads to two outcomes: dropping out of the game due to being overwhelmed by the learning curve and the

lack of player assistance, or sticking with it (against the odds) and starting to slowly gather information over the course of play. The second outcome can be a lengthy process and take a tremendous amount of perseverance. This article advocates for a third outcome, one that will not only increase your own likelihood of sticking with a game as a new player, but also the likelihood of this taking place for other new players.

You may have heard the term *pedagogy*. Its most basic definition is the theory and practice of learning. In the field of pedagogy is a method of teaching where a student learns a topic and then prepares lessons or materials to help teach other students. The term for this is *learning by teaching*. Considering that the term pedagogy is derived from Ancient Greek and means *to lead a child*, it's unfortunate that we don't have an equally interesting Ancient Greek term for *learning by teaching* we can use. The Germans use *LdL* to refer to their term, *Lernen durch Lehren*.

By pursuing a learning by teaching model, you can be more than a player and help grow the PBM hobby. Some of you have already pursued this (thank you), and it's an outcome



The screenshot shows a Groups.io group page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Groups.io', a search bar, and links for 'Help', 'Log In', and 'Sign Up'. Below the navigation bar is a 'Home' button. The main content area features a large image with the text 'SuperNova Encyclopedia Galactica' overlaid on a background of mathematical diagrams. Below the image, the group name 'SuperNova PBM: Encyclopedia Galactica' is displayed with the email 'sneg@groups.io'. The 'Group Description' section states it's a mailing list for discussing the project and general PBM topics, with a link to the project on Google Sheets. The 'Group Information' section lists 5 members, 100 topics, and a start date of Jan 1. The 'Group Settings' section lists various permissions, including that all subscribers can post, posts don't require approval, and subscriptions require approval. At the bottom, there are buttons for '+ Apply For Membership In This Group' and '+ Log In If You Are Already A Member'.

that I would like to see more commonplace in the PBM community as a whole.

I want to share my learning by teaching stories for two PBM games I actively play – [SuperNova](#) and [Middle-earth](#). These are not game reviews, but I do cover my thoughts about these two games (synopsis: I like them both a lot, sign up!) and a bit of the game mechanics as they are relevant to the learning process. I picked these two from the six PBM games I currently play as I've done the most learning by teaching work with SuperNova and Middle-earth. I have two primary goals in this article: 1)

to encourage other players to pursue a learning by teaching model in their respective games to help grow the PBM hobby and 2) to encourage other players to give SuperNova and Middle-earth a try using the resources I've created to make player onboarding easier. Let's start with SuperNova.

SuperNova

SuperNova by Rolling Thunder Games is an open-ended space empire game. You design your own empire and species, start off on a home world with limited information about the galaxy around you, and then send ships off to explore the

unknown that awaits you. While a large portion of the orders and rules relate to space combat and ground combat, the game also has strong technological and economic elements to it. Combat is not inevitable, as your neighbors may prefer to trade. In fact, it may take as long as 12-24 months (24-48 turns) to encounter another player in the game. My first SuperNova empire just encountered another player on Turn 33 (just over 15 months of play). SuperNova can be a

lonely game for the first one to two years. This is a game you think about in terms of years, not months.

Space empire games were a popular (if not the most popular) PBM genre and many games came and went in the 1980s and 1990s, but only a small number in this genre remain today. SuperNova had several incarnations over the past 30 plus years. Its most recent form, SuperNova: Rise of the Empire, launched in 2003

SuperNova: Rise of the Empire Player Aid – Orders by Category (Part I)

v1.0.2, 6 May 2019 Page 1 of 10

DIPLOMACY ORDERS			RESEARCH & TRAINING ORDERS		
Code	Name	Short Description	Code	Name	Short Description
DIP	Diplomacy	Diplomatic action towards the population group of a neutral	CTRN	Colonist Training	Convert regular population units into trained colonists
MESS	Send Message	Send an in-game message to another empire	LFE	Live Fire Exercise	Train ships in a fleet by conducting live fire exercises
PAP	Political Action Proposal	Set alliance level to another empire impacting fleet behavior	SRP	Set Research Priority	Set research priorities for your research groups
PRIV	Privacy Option	Toggle privacy status for players requesting your contact info	CHARACTER ORDERS		
REA	Request Empire Address	Request the contact info of another player	Code	Name	Short Description
EMPIRE ORDERS			AC	Assign Commander	Assign a character to a specific army, fleet, or world
Code	Name	Short Description	NAME	Name Legendary Characters	Rename characters, initially listed as <needs name> on report
REVO	Instigate Revolution	Change government type, limited to once every 25 turns	EXIL	Exile Character	Remove a character to make room for new characters to be hired
TR	Transfer Items	Transfer item from one population group to another on same world	STANDING ORDERS		
DESCRIPTION ORDERS			Code	Name	Short Description
Code	Name	Short Description	DELS	Delete Standing Orders	Remove existing standing orders for your empire
ANZ	Analyze Item	Complete description details on a piece of technology	ESTA	Edit Standing Orders	Change the priority order of existing standing orders
FOB	Fleet Order of Battle	Complete description details about the capabilities of a fleet	XCTRN	Colonist Training	Convert regular population units into trained colonists
INST	Describe Installation	Complete description details on an installation	XEXPL	Exploration	Send exploration team from fleet in orbit to explore a world
RTD	Request Technology Descriptions	Provide a list and description of every item you have researched	XLC	Load Cargo	Load cargo from a population group onto a fleet
EXPLORATION ORDERS			XLFE	Live Fire Exercise	Train ships in a fleet by conducting live fire exercises
Code	Name	Short Description	XMOVE	Move to Warp Point	Move a fleet to a warp point in the same system, does not use fuel
CSV	Colonial Attrition Survey	Survey a world to determine the survival chances for colonists	XNM	Naval Movement	Move a fleet from one location to another within a star system
EXPL	Exploration	Send an exploration team from a fleet in orbit to explore a world	XOC	Offload Cargo	Transfer cargo from a fleet to a population group
GEO	Geological Survey	Conduct a geological analysis of a world from a fleet in orbit	XSENS	Sensor Sweep	Detect alien fleets at the location of the fleet issuing the order
ORB	Orbital Reconnaissance	Conduct reconnaissance of a world from a fleet in orbit	XSHIP	Build Ship	Construct ships at a shipyard
PMAP	Planet Map	Conduct the mapping of a world from a fleet in orbit	XSKIM	Skim Gas Giant	Allow properly-equipped fleet to collect fuel from a gas giant world
SS	System Scan	Conduct a system scan from a fleet in the system	XTR	Transfer Item	Transfer item from one population group to another on same world
INDUSTRY ORDERS			XWARP	Warp Movement	Send a fleet through a warp point to another system
Code	Name	Short Description	DISABLED ORDERS (NOT CURRENTLY USED)		
BI	Build Item	Assign items to the production queue of a population group	Code	Name	Short Description
CON	Construct Installation	Create installations in a population group	ALLG	Swear Allegiance	Swear allegiance to another empire
DD	Design Details	Complete description details on an existing ship design	BALG	Break Alliance	Remove your loyalty to another empire
DISM	Dismantle Installation	Break down an existing installation into its component parts	BOMB	Orbital Bombardment	Attack an enemy population group from a specified fleet
EB	Edit Build	Modify the existing production queue of a population group	TREE	Allegiance Tree	Provide a listing of every empire that has sworn allegiance to you
ED	Eliminate Design	Remove a ship design template from the imperial records	XBOMB	Standing Order – Orbital Bombardment	Attack an enemy population group from a specified fleet
			XDIP	Standing Order – Diplomacy	Diplomatic action towards the population group of a neutral

with the Andromeda Galaxy game, and the rules were refined most recently in 2015 with the Draco Galaxy game.

I am playing two empires in the Draco Galaxy game. The first one I started in mid-2018 just a couple of months after returning to the PBM hobby, and the second one I started in April of this year. I started a second empire when several of my PBM friends decided to join the game. This allowed me to be in synch with them as they learned new aspects of the game. Don't let the 1996-era website for Rolling Thunder Games turn you off. There's a jewel of a game behind all of that primitive HTML code (note: turns results are sent as PDF files). If you like slow, long-term, planning-oriented games, SuperNova may be a great choice for you. Turn results are regularly 25-40 pages in length. Some call SuperNova "spreadsheets in space", and while I do, in fact, have a dozen or so spreadsheets for each of my empires for planning purposes, it's by no means a requirement to play.

SuperNova has a clever set of mechanics in the game where you can issue orders to learn more about how the game works. You start the game knowing how to build 89 different installations and 144 different technologies. These

numbers increase as you learn new technologies over the course of the game and unlock new tech trees and installations. What exactly is an Imperial Port Authority Complex (installation) or a System Beacon (technology)? You can issue the INST (Describe Installation) order or an ANZ (Analyze Item) order in the game to learn about specific installations or technologies. The rulebook will only take you so far, the rest of the rules you will need to learn within the game itself by issuing these orders to learn more. The challenge is, you can only issue 40 orders a turn (unless you want to pay for a double turn and issue 80 orders). I spent the first six months of the game issuing a lot of INST and ANZ orders to learn about installations and technologies.

Rolling Thunder Games runs a [modern online forum](#) (much better than their website) where players can interact. However, information sharing seems to be limited in the public forums. This is one of those games where the nature of the game leads to mistrust between players and information is prized and used as a competitive advantage. This situation in the community, coupled with the need to issue orders in-game to learn about how the game works, puts new players at a disadvantage. While I understand the sentiments of

players who have learned the hard way, we shouldn't create obstacles for new players to understand how the game works.

Rolling Thunder games published a series of rulebooks for SuperNova covering the basic game rules, empire creation, orders syntax, how to use warp points to travel between the stars, and how to create convoy orders to automate ship movement and transport. The rulebooks are quite detailed, and they are better than most PBM rulebooks out there, but it's a lot of information for a new player to take in at once, and not all of it is relevant for the first six months.

The screenshot shows the SuperNova.Wiki homepage. On the left is a blue sidebar with navigation options: Home, Encyclopedia, Orders, Resources, Technology, Installations, Characters, Topics, Topics Pages, Players (Empires, Ships, Systems, Death Machines), and Links (SuperNova Site). The main content area is white with a dark blue header. It includes a search bar, a 'TABLE OF CONTENTS' section with links like 'Welcome to SuperNova...', 'What is SuperNova?', 'How to use SuperNova.W...', and 'Contribute Content'. Below that is a 'LAST EDITED BY' section for Raven Zachary (08/27/2019). A large image of a galaxy is featured with the credit 'Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech'. A blue notification box states 'Site last updated: 27 August 2019, Total Pages: 533' and points to an 'Announcements' page. The main text area contains a 'Welcome to SuperNova.Wiki' section and a 'What is SuperNova?' section.

After finishing a read-through of the SuperNova manuals, some things made sense to me, but I was also left with a lot of questions and no clear answers. Initially, I sent many emails to the SuperNova gamemaster, Pete Dorman. He was helpful in replying to my emails, but I didn't want to overburden a busy gamemaster with mentoring me as a new player. Thankfully, I found Scott Vandersee, a SuperNova player who had published a helpful new player document and answered many more questions for me.

When learning a new boardgame or miniatures game, I often create reference sheets and player aids. This process allows me to both learn the rules of the game and share these creations to help other players who are struggling to learn the rules. Learning by teaching. I created a ten-page [SuperNova Player Aid](#) covering game orders, warp points, characters, diplomacy, industry & production, fleets & armies, stars & planets, colonization, and other miscellaneous game rules. This doesn't replace a read-through of the rulebooks, but it helps when filling out your turns.

With my newfound comfort with the rules to SuperNova after having created the Player Aid, I shifted into game advocacy mode and convinced four people from other PBM games I played to give SuperNova a try. I created an online group called the [Encyclopedia Galactica](#) (borrowing from Isaac Asimov's Foundation Series) for the five of us to ask questions and share in-game information such as the purposes of specific installations and technologies, ship designs we created, and systems we have explored. If most of the veteran players didn't want to help new players, then the new players would help each other. As we started to collect a much larger list and definitions of

installations and technologies, initially as a shared Google Sheet, it made sense for this information to reside in a public wiki that could benefit not just the five of us, but any SuperNova players, especially new players.

In late May 2019, I purchased the domain name, [supernova.wiki](#), researched leading wiki software platforms, evaluated hosting providers, and ultimately picked Wiki.js, a modern wiki software platform running on Digital Ocean, a hosting provider. I can't speak highly enough about Wiki.js and Digital Ocean. If anyone out there is inspired to create a wiki for one of their favorite PBM games, I would encourage them to use this combo. For the month of June, every spare minute I had (including commute time on the bus to and from work each day) was spent adding game information into the new [SuperNova.Wiki](#) site. The wiki now includes 533 pages covering game orders, resources, technology, installations, characters, and a variety of other game topics. Eventually, I hope to include ship designs, empire contacts, a catalog of explored systems, and details about the NPC races, including the dreaded Death Machines. New players can use this resource instead of spending their precious 40

orders a turn on INST and ANZ orders.

My hope is that the process I went through to create a SuperNova Player Aid, an online group for new players, and the wiki for SuperNova will result in new players having an easier time in onboarding and result in higher retention rates for SuperNova. If you're interested in an open-ended space empire game, give SuperNova a try!

Middle-earth

Some of my most cherished childhood memories involve the works of J.R.R. Tolkien – listening to the BBC Radio adaptation of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* with my parents, watching the animated Ralph Bakshi film in the late 1970s with my brothers, and playing some of the early Middle-earth board games with my brothers and cousins. The *Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien is one of my favorite books, my car has a J.R.R. Tolkien monogram sticker, one of my favorite boardgames is *War of the Ring* by Ares Games, and I play the Middle-earth miniatures game by Game Workshop. So, it should not surprise you that I am a Middle-earth PBM fanatic.

You may have read my article in

Suspense & Decision Magazine Issue #18 entitled *Play-by-Flash-Drive: Face-to-Face Middle-earth PBM Gaming in Las Vegas* where I provided an overview of my experience organizing and participating in a face-to-face game of Middle-earth. While I won't cover the details of that event here as it's not about player onboarding, I would encourage you to read that article if you are interested in organizing an in-person game for one of your favorite PBM games.

I returned to the PBM hobby in 2018 after a 25-year break, and one of the first games I joined was Middle-earth PBM (MEPBM). It was the last PBM I had played back in the early 1990s, and I was excited to see that it was still in operation (through a different company) many years later. In the mid to late 1980s, I was a fan of Game Systems, Inc.'s (GSI) Earthwood PBM. I moved over to playing Middle-earth PBM when it was released by GSI in 1991.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Middle-earth PBM by Middle-earth Games, it's set in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth, the world of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and you play as a good, evil, or neutral nation, working together

with your teammates to take control of the lands of Middle-earth. Unlike SuperNova, which is an open-ended PBM, games of Middle-earth have victory conditions, and it's not uncommon for a game to end in 20-30 turns, about a year of play, often due to one team resigning. Think of this like Chess – at some point it's obvious who is going to win. Why keep playing? There are now multiple modules being offered that span different eras of Middle-earth with variant rules. It's more wargame than role-playing game, but there's enough character role-playing to interest people with that preference. Mailed turns and handwritten, note card diplomacy from 25 years ago have been replaced by PDF turns via email and online groups for communication.


Middle-earth is a game that I found easy to learn and hard to master, and that's probably one of the many reasons I love this game. The number and types of orders you can issue every turn are based on the number and types of characters you have. There are four types of characters in the game: Commanders, Agents, Emissaries, and Mages. Each character is allowed to issue two orders per turn (in most scenarios), and only one can be a skill order focused on that

character's specialty. For instance, an Agent could steal gold from an enemy population center and then move to a new location. That Agent could not both steal gold and attempt to kidnap an enemy character on the same turn. As the game progresses, you are allowed to recruit more characters, and so you have more orders available. This means that the game increases in complexity every five turns. Each player has their personal preferences. You will encounter other players who treat the game entirely as a military campaign, hiring mostly Commanders. Other players love subterfuge and play mostly Agents. I prefer to play Mage-focused nations, casting spells and searching for lost artifacts. Each nation has certain strengths that may encourage a specific play style.

The rulebook for Middle-earth is well-written and revised regularly. Considering that many PBM game rulebooks haven't been revised in decades, this is refreshing. The rulebook is organized in a way to make learning the mechanics of the game easy, but until you play with experienced players, it's not clear what the best orders for a particular character are in that specific situation. Using the Chess analogy again, a knight can be an incredibly powerful piece when played correctly.



TERRAIN & MAP Icons

<p>Middle-earth PBM</p> <p>Player Aid</p> <p>Version 1.2.1</p> <p>13 August 2018</p>  <p>Letters in the tables indicate the section of the <i>Middle-earth Guide</i> to review for more details on this topic.</p> <p>Created by Raven Zachary raven@rinzai.com</p> <p>http://bit.ly/mepbmaid</p>	MAP TERRAIN TILES J			POPULATION CENTRES J			RIVERS & ROADS J		
	Results Sheet	JOverseer	Terrain Type	Results Sheet	JOverseer	Population Centre Type	Results Sheet	JOverseer	River & Road Type
			Open Seas			Camp			Minor River
			Coastal Waters			Village			Major River
			Shore			Town			Road
			Open Plains			Major Town			Bridge
			Hills & Rough			City			Ford
			Mixed Forest	FORTIFICATIONS J			MISCELLANEOUS J		
			Desert Wastes	Results Sheet	JOverseer	Fortification Type	Results Sheet	JOverseer	Miscellaneous Type
			Fens & Swamp			Tower			Harbour
		Mountains			Fort			Port	
					Castle		<i>Icons vary by unit type and nation color</i>	Good Armies Free Peoples	
					Keep		<i>Icons vary by unit type and nation color</i>	Evil Armies Dark Servants	
					Citadel		<i>Icons vary by unit type and nation color</i>	Neutral Armies	

When played incorrectly, it moves awkwardly and can be irrelevant to controlling the center of the board.

Because most Middle-earth players start on a team (Free Peoples vs. Dark Servants) with nine other players, player-to-player mentoring is common in this game. When a game starts, someone on each team creates an online group (generally at Groups.io as Yahoo Groups is slowly dying) and then they invite everyone on their team to join. You don't have to know

anyone to play. You will be grouped with one of the two teams when you sign up, and all team members are given team contact information when the turns are sent out. It's common for players to post draft orders for review by the team. This is where things may break down from time to time. If you combine an impatient perfectionist who's been playing the game for decades with a new player who is overly sensitive to feedback, it can lead to a bad experience, including the possibility that a

new player may drop from the game entirely. It's your nation to control, but in a team game, all nations on the same team have to work together, so you don't get to play your nation in isolation...unless you play as a neutral nation.

I love neutral nations in Middle-earth. You start on no team at all. Over the course of the game, you declare loyalty to one of the teams on some future turn and then join their group. I would not recommend a neutral position for a new player as there's no in-game mentoring opportunities. I have gravitated more and more towards neutral

positions in Middle-earth as it allows me to interview the teams before I commit (the Middle-earth political dating game). I have built up enough understanding of the rules and best practices over the past 18 months that playing a neutral now without in-game mentoring is working well for me.

The player onboarding activities I pursued for Middle-earth are similar to those I mentioned above for SuperNova. I created a fourteen-page [Middle-earth Player Aid](#) covering game orders, map details, characters, spells, population centers, production, economics, armies,

The screenshot shows the MEPBM Forums website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the 'middle earth' logo, 'Sign Up', 'Log In', a search icon, and a menu icon. Below the navigation bar is a welcome message: 'Welcome to the new MEPBM Forums' with a close button. The message states: 'Please read the [New Forums Testing Feedback](#) post. We will be migrating the historical [mepbm.com](#) posts to this site sometime in mid to late September 2019.'

Below the message is a filter bar with 'all categories' (dropdown), 'Latest' (selected), 'Top', and 'Categories'. The main content area is a table of forum topics with columns for 'Topic', 'Replies', 'Views', and 'Activity'.

Topic	Replies	Views	Activity
<p>New Forums Testing Feedback (updated 20 July 2019)</p> <p>Announcement</p> <p>New Forums Testing Notes Change is difficult, and there will likely be things you don't like as much as the old Forums. That's ok! Do your best to separate your initial feedback on the new Forums from what you think of... read more</p>	16	65	Aug 5
<p>The Front Sheet (updated 25 July 2019)</p> <p>Announcement</p> <p>[This will be posted by Clint] Games Starting Soon The following games are currently accepting setups, and due to start soon. Click on any of the links below full details or to sign up. Game 77: 1650 2 nation Gunboat ... read more</p>	4	59	Jun 25
<p>Help with testing Discourse smartphone apps</p>	4	22	11d
<p>How do I recruit Gandalf in 1650?</p> <p>Question</p>	4	33	Aug 6
<p>Game 240</p> <p>Game</p>	5	64	Jul 30

navies, combat, movement, and other miscellaneous game rules. This doesn't replace a read-through of the rulebooks, but it helps when filling out your turns. I created the player aid for Middle-earth before I started work on the SuperNova version, whereas I worked on the SuperNova wiki before I started the Middle-earth one.

game information out there to gather and place on the wiki, there were a number of existing websites with information for the game already to review and replicate, although all of them hadn't been updated in over a decade. Creating a wiki for Middle-earth was larger in scope and would take more time. I decided to create the wiki for SuperNova first, and then apply

MEPBM Wiki

Search...

Home

Encyclopedia

Orders

Spells

Artifacts

Riddles

Dragons

Encounters

Characters

Topics

Topic Pages

Articles

Newsletters

Modules

Third Age 1650

Third Age 2950

Fourth Age 1000

MEPBM Wiki

The wiki for Middle-earth PBM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- > Welcome to MEPBM Wiki
- > How to use MEPBM Wiki
- > Contribute Content
- > Disclaimers

LAST EDITED BY

Raven Zachary

Last Tuesday at 2:59 PM

Site last updated: 3 September 2019, Total Pages: 902

Please see the [Announcements](#) page for a list of recent additions to MEPBM Wiki.

Welcome to MEPBM Wiki

Welcome to MEPBM Wiki: a wiki-powered site for the Middle-earth turn-based, strategy games run by [GSIL t/a Middle-earth Games](#).

Middle-earth Games run turn-based, strategy games set in the world of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, including elements from ICE's Middle-earth Role Playing under license from GSIL. Play as either the Free Peoples or the Dark Servants, and work together with your team-mates to take control of the lands of Middle-earth. Earn your victory through a combination of martial strength, magical prowess, and economic power.

I had the idea to create a wiki for Middle-earth before I started work on the wiki for SuperNova, but the process was considerably more intimidating. Not only had Middle-earth been continuously in operation since 1993 (26 years!) with a lot more

my learnings on that project to Middle-earth.

The day I launched SuperNova.Wiki, June 21st, 2019, I started working on [MEPBM Wiki](#). When you have momentum, keep going! I purchased the domain name

mepbm.wiki, although I ended up launching on the mepbm.com domain name instead once that was transferred to me from a former player. As with the wiki for SuperNova, I used Wiki.js and Digital Ocean. June was focused on the wiki for SuperNova and July and August were focused on the wiki for Middle-earth. The wiki for Middle-earth took hundreds of hours of work. I was averaging about 20-30 hours a week on this project while also working a full-time job. Thank you to my patient and understanding family, especially my wife. If there's anything I learned from this project I can share with you – temper your enthusiasm with proper pacing. It was exhausting. I should have instead spent 20 or 30 weeks to build the site instead of just ten weeks. There was no rush, but I had the desire to complete the project. It was a bit of an obsession. The site now includes 902 pages covering orders, spells, artifacts, riddles, dragons, encounters, characters, a variety of game topics, information on all the game modules, and a library of strategy articles, including old scanned issues of the GSI Whispers of the Wood newsletter.

This is actually how I connected with Suspense & Decision

publisher Charles Mosteller. I was scanning an issue of Whispers of the Wood for the wiki and came across a couple of articles he had written back in the mid 1990s. That same weekend, Charles sent out the notice that he was jumping back into publishing the magazine and has created a new mailing list, so I sent him the copies of his old articles. There is still so much more content to add to MEPBM Wiki, but I am having to take a break to work on the new MEPBM forums in September before I go back to updating the wiki.

Which leads me to the other project – migrating the old mepbm.com Forums to Discourse. This is the project I am working on right now and should have completed in the next few weeks. The old mepbm.com Forums have been operated by Darrell Swoap since 2003. I offered to migrate the mepbm.com Forums to a more modern software solution and have active players help with moderating the Forums since Darrell no longer plays the game. Thank you to Darrell Swoap for managing the Forums for the past 15 plus years! This has been a great asset to the Middle-earth player community. I hope that the [new MEPBM.com forums](#) will increase player communication.

As with SuperNova, my hope is that the process I went through to create a Middle-earth Player Aid, the wiki for Middle-earth, and the new Forums I am working on now will result in new players having an easier time with onboarding and result in higher retention rates for Middle-earth. If you're interested in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien, give Middle-earth a try!

In Conclusion

We can help play-by-mail (or turn-based games) onboarding through the process of learning by teaching. I've listed a few examples that I've pursued for two games, and I'm not the only one who has done this. Many PBM communities have been aided by passionate players. I think about the work that Charles Mosteller has done for the Hyborian War community with his GrimFinger.net information website and his participation in the [Road of Kings](#) forum.

Learning by teaching doesn't have to mean a direct teacher to student model where you are communicating in real-time to other learners. It can come through the process of creating materials, such as player aids and wikis, or the creation of communication channels, such

as forums, mailing lists, and online groups.

We as play-by-mail gamers can contribute to making the hobby a more inviting place for new players. This applies to both experienced and new players alike. Many people are trying PBM games for the first time and quitting. Instead of focusing on trying to attract new players to our hobby, why not improve the onboarding process for those who are already giving it a try so that fewer people leave the hobby? We all have busy lives, and even taking time out to get turns in on time can seem overwhelming. If you can spare the time, help grow the hobby by making the games that you love to play easier for new players to learn. Be more than a player.

Player Resources

SuperNova

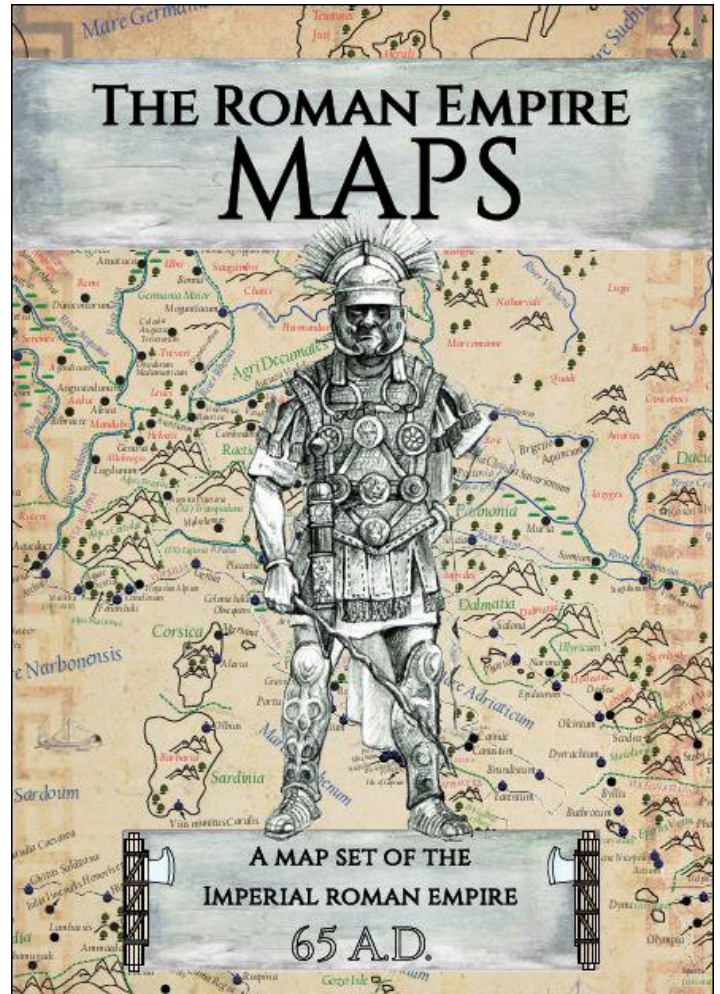
- [Player Aid](#)
- [SuperNova.Wiki](#)
- [Encyclopedia Galactica New Player Group](#)

Middle-earth

- [Player Aid](#)
- [MEPBM Wiki](#)
- [New Forums](#)



Raven Zachary returned to play-by-mail gaming in 2018. He lives in Portland, Oregon, USA, and is user Rinzai on the [PlayByMail.Net Forums](#). Raven plays [Middle-earth](#), [SuperNova](#), [TribeNet](#), [A New Dawn](#), [The Isles](#), and [DungeonWorld](#).



Hi Charles,

Thanks for getting in touch. If you could mention in the issue that the [Rome is Burning](#) ancient game waiting list is open, with the game set to launch in May next year, that would be appreciated (I know you put the information out there already on your Facebook page, thank you!). It's filling up nicely!

Regards,
Richard Watts
[AGEMA](#)



middle  earth

Turn-based Gaming
in the world of
J.R.R. Tolkien's
"The Lord of the Rings"

Five free turns for all new players
Free gaming software
Over a dozen modules and variants
Award-winning design
The only officially-licensed Lord of the Rings PBM game

www.middleearthgames.com

"You are afraid of nothing and will overcome all challenges. You stand for what is right and will bare your fangs only for freedom and justice. You are part of the Pack: thinking and acting in unison for the glory of the Nation."

Dewiek Elder Nation

Who are we?

We are a race of (very) large, fearless, telepathic and technologically advanced warrior wolves. Hunters, warriors, freedom fighters and explorers. Searching for our lost history and trying to unravel the mysteries of our creation. *Can you be the key that unlocks it?*

Why are you needed?

It is our destiny as the most ancient spacefaring race to continue to explore, expand and seek knowledge. To regrow the Nation to its former glory, after so much was destroyed. This is happening right now. We need YOU to help us continue to flourish as we rebuild the Nation. You can truly carve your own niche in this terrifying, but beautiful world. Much has been lost; knowledge and power await to be reclaimed; old enemies lurk half-defeated; territory to be re-discovered.

What can we offer you?

When you join the DEN, you join a true Pack collective. We share everything - information, resources, warships. From day one, you will be a vital member of a growing and fun loving - but fiercely proud and determined - Pack. *Your voice is vital.*

Good hunting!

Hail stranger!

Sit down, pour yourself a barrel of ale.

Remove those trousers.

We have finally found you.

If you are receiving this transmission, it is because our long, dangerous search for the best and bravest of the lost Dewiek Packs is gathering pace.

You and those closest to you have been chosen. You share the blood of the ancient warrior wolves of the Dewiek Elder Nation and it is time for us to reunite. To grow.

Ships await to carry you towards a life of adventure. You will not need much. Rid yourself of worthless trinkets.

I said take those trousers off I won't tell you again :angry:

We leave at first light (well, early afternoon-ish probably. After second breakfast. It's a long journey).

Let us drink. Celebrate. Only the most steadfast are called.

For more information contact head of recruitment: Lyceum the Outdweller or Aadolf - High Lord of the Nation. Alternatively just click the 'Join' button in the recruitment forum once you have signed up for a free trial account at:

www.phoenixbse.com

The Dewiek Elder Nation are recruiting!

Dwarven Descent Into DungeonWorld

The Madhouse Saga of Gobworth Browstone

Charles Mosteller

The winds of change blew through his ears, whispering to him in a siren's voice, luring him to the high path of adventure. Hither came Gobworth Browstone from the Realmheart of Dwarvendom to roll the die of fate. For destiny called!

But not alone would his feet be led down paths yet to come, for I had every intention to be right there with, come what may. Ah, the twists and turns that a PBM game player's life takes, as the creative energies of their imagination begin to flow anew. As [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#) asked once upon a time ago, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

For PBM gaming is one of the true loves of my life (even if there have been long moments of separation between this love and I, in the intervening years of life). Yet, here we are, back together, PBM and I. *Forward, ho!*

So what this is, is the first in what shall hopefully become a full blown series of articles about my character's and my

respective journeys into, through, and across a PBM game called [DungeonWorld](#).

But why, you ask?

Well, because sometimes in life, there's just things that you just need to do, things that you've just GOT to do, and any real attempt at explanation of such undertakings invariably end up falling short.

Oh, sure, a part if it has to do with trying to figure out a host of different ways to try and reinvigorate the hobby of play by mail, but mostly, I suspect that it's really as much about returning to an aspect of my personal life that has largely been a very fun and positive aspect of my life, one that holds many warm memories. As I age, I find that, more and more, it is the small pleasures of life that are actually the largest. And for me, personally, the memories of PBM gaming collectively play a very big part of whom I am, as a human being - for better or for worse!

But why go on such a journey, a trek back unto the realm of play by mail, all by myself?

All the better, I think, to let a few others tag along with me. After all, why hog all the fun to myself?

Plus, who knows? Maybe even some of you will then dare to step forth into journeys of your own, like-minded souls traversing DungeonWorld - and the much larger universe of play by mail gaming that lies just beyond.

While DungeonWorld was not my own initial entryway into the realm of play by mail gaming, nothing says that it can't be yours. And even if you've already played PBM games in years past, nothing says that you can't venture forth into that memorable plateau of gaming fun, once more. All that it takes is a willing heart and an imagination that still dares to light up your life from within.

For me, over thirty years ago, it was a PBM game called [Hyborian War](#) that opened up a whole new dimension in gaming. I had never really even thought about using the postal system as a way to play games, before I started encountering all of those advertisements for Hyborian War that I encountered, of all places, on the back of some black and white Conan comic books in magazine form. Even then, though, PBM didn't really click

with me, until I got back the list of kingdoms available to play in Hyborian War from a company called [Reality Simulations, Inc.](#) That was just the beginning.

I fondly recall spending hours - literally - pouring over a list of thirty-six kingdoms, struggling to decide which kingdom to pick, and I made the decision to take the plunge and learn a little bit more about this experience known as PBM gaming.

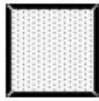
It's when you receive your first set of turn results, though, even far more so than when



Terrain List

Imp.=Impassable terrain, cannot be shot through by ranged weapons, Imp.+:=Impassable terrain, can be shot through by ranged weapons, *:=Combat modifiers are constant.

an Open Courtyard



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

the Assembly Guildhall <2>



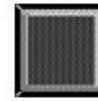
MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

Chapel of D.V. <3>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

a Wall



MPs: Imp. Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

the IGW Guildhall <5>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

the Eagles Guildhall <6>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

the Five Paths Guildhall <7>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

the C.O.R. Guildhall <8>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

an Unlocked Doorway



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

Corridor



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

Shallow Water



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: -2
Def. Adj.: -2

EWM Hall <12>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

a Long House



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

Monks Hall <14>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

an Army Recruit Point <15>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

Squires Hall <16>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

a Dispensary <17>



MPs: 1 Vis. Adj.: 0
Att. Adj.: 0
Def. Adj.: 0

you issue your first set of turn orders, that the real magic of playing games through the mail bursts forth right before your very eyes.

Oh, to be certain, there is much fun to always be found in a great many different forms of gaming entertainment. But that's just it, you see. PBM gaming, for all that's ever been said about it, remains as entertaining as ever - *perhaps even moreso than ever before, if you really want the full truth about it all.*

Why DungeonWorld, though? Honestly, I could have picked

any of a number of different play by mail games, or the lineal, modern-day descendants thereof, to take the plunge back into PBM gaming with, but Madhouse UK has a good reputation across the PBM community at large, it is a game that has been around for a long time and has a loyal following, and my perception of what the initial learning curve is to go from being a clueless newbie to an active player in the game that grasps what to do and how to do it persuaded me to go with DungeonWorld as the initial entry point in my planned series of articles on PBM games in the current

gaming market.

Plus, too, DungeonWorld GM Steve Tierney has begun a podcast series that I watch, and I like what he's doing with that [Madhouse UK podcast](#). If you haven't checked it out for yourself, I would encourage you to do so. I really believe that just the simple act of more people talking about PBM gaming can make a world of difference in growing the overall player base of PBM. Certainly, the PlayByMail.Net Facebook page has seen a large amount of activity, of late, from a whole host of different individuals talking about, of all things, PBM games that they've played in the past - and in numerous instances, PBM games that they are still currently playing. And it's not all men, either.

Before I let Gobworth Browstone, a Dwarven fighter, take center stage in this series of articles on DungeonWorld, I am going to have to stir the pot of time, and make some time to dig my way through the rulebook more thoroughly.

And, of course, as we travel on this journey, together, I will be asking the advice of you, the [S&D](#) reading audience, as to what you think that Gobworth Browstone should do in his next turn. Granted, Gobworth has a mind of his own, and you know

how dwarves can be, at times, so he likely won't always be willing to listen to our readership's collective wisdom, but I really don't want him to get himself into a bunch of situations that hold the potential for great danger, without the benefit of the company of you, the reader.

You know what else? There's nothing that prevents you from submitting a character of your own, and asking DungeonWorld GM Steve Tierney to throw you in the mix, right along with Gobworth Browstone. That way, you can live vicariously through your character, just as I will through mine.

And we can do so, together!

But only if you participate. And participate, you should, for the more, the merrier. Gobworth Browstone is far too grumpy a fellow to carry you, though, so your character will have to pull their weight. It's been said that there's strength in numbers, but if your character's not a dwarf, then you're already at a disadvantage, right from the very start. That's the way that Gobworth sees it, anyway.

And if you plan on going this adventure with him, then you might as well go ahead and get that through that skull of yours. Do be sure to wear your finest, as this adventure begins to

unfold before our very eyes, for much in the way of danger lies in wait for us, one and all, and if your character doesn't make it, then at least they'll look good as they lie in repose.



Hither came Gobworth Browstone. . .

Not exactly inspiring, but it'll have to do, I reckon. The places I find myself venturing to has really struck an all-time low, I must say.

Pah!

This place is damp - far too damned damp for my taste. Barely fit for men, much less a dwarf. HMMMMPH!

Best to not dawdle. I'll have a quick look about this mess of a place, and then I'll be moving on. I knew I should have bypassed this whole swamp. Nothing good'll come from this, I'd wager. Insect bites sure aren't what I'd call adventure. *Blasted things!*

Lots of people moving about

this place - and lots of people mean lots of opportunities, lots of possibilities. One can hardly expect a dwarf like me to make decisions on an empty stomach. A dwarf's got to have grub, or he's not worth his axe. *HMMMMPH!*

Who designed this Hell hole, anyway? It clearly wasn't a dwarven architect. It's just a hodgepodge of confusion, if you ask me. I've never seen such a mess of a courtyard in all my born days.

Hey, you there! A dragon roars in my stomach. Where can I get a bite to eat? I ain't after slop, either, so don't point me in the wrong direction.

And so it was that a dwarf known as Gobworth Browstone prepared to whet his appetite for adventure in the Land of Bereny. But he didn't have to start off on an empty stomach, even if he somehow managed to find himself here, smack dab in the courtyard of the dungeon known as Swinderlog Hole, located deep beneath the notorious Swinderlog Swamp in the Home Ward of Bereny.

TO BE CONTINUED IN ISSUE 20

Join Suspense & Decision's editor in DungeonWorld!

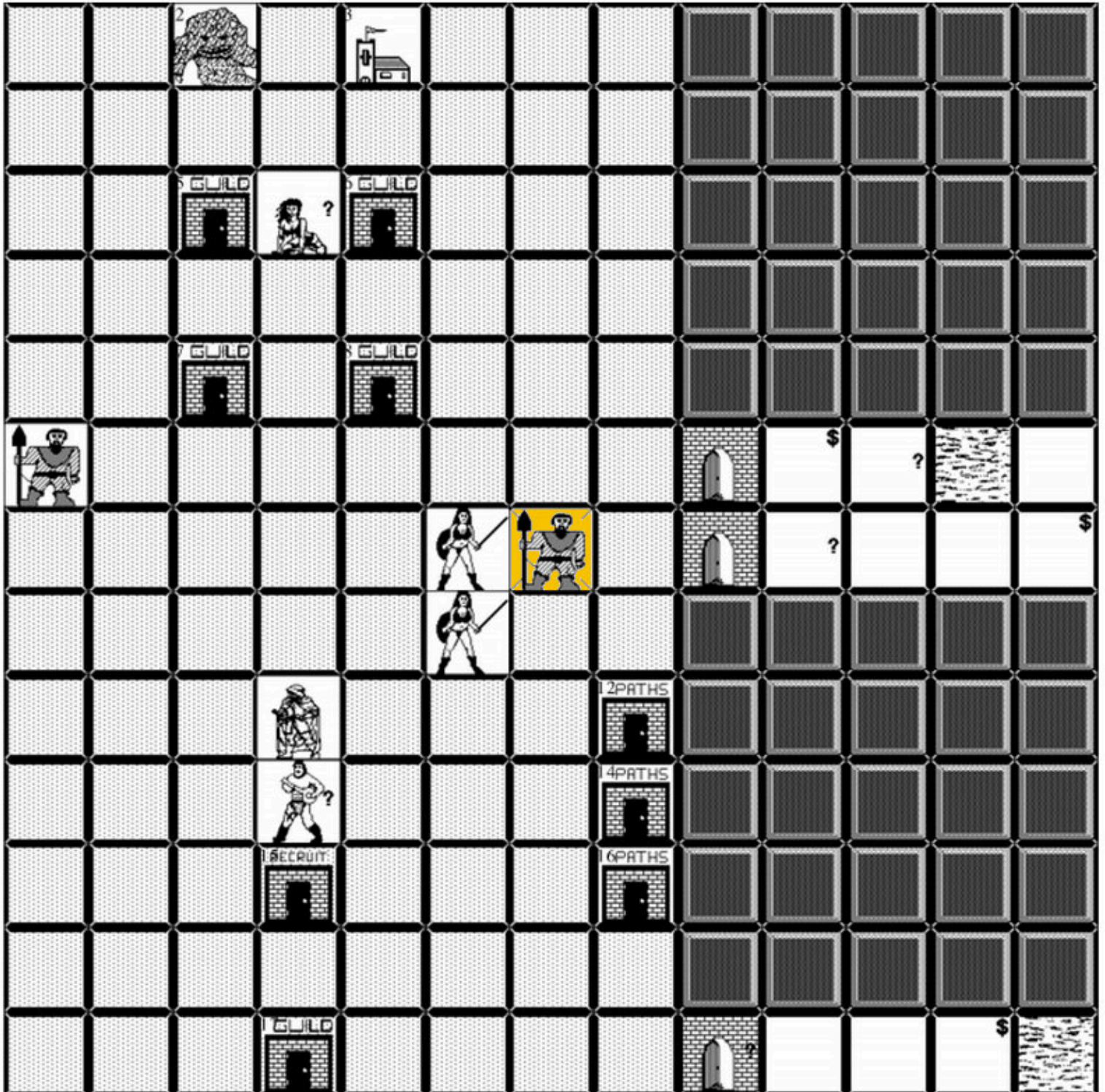


DUNGEONWORLD



Male Dwarven Warrior
Gobworth Browstone

Turn #1



DungeonWorld is run by [Madhouse Interactive Entertainment](#)

\$2.50

STARWEB

a play-by-mail game of star-spanning empires



7TH
EDITION

RULES
for playing the
multi-player strategic space game by
FLYING BUFFALO INC.
— play-by-mail since 1970 —

www.flyingbuffalo.com

#9201



DO YOU REMEMBER THIS OLD PBM AD?

KJC GAMES FREEPOST, Dept. SFX 3
 THORNTON CLEVELEYS • BLACKPOOL • FY5 3BR
 Telephone (0253) 866345 • Fax (0253) 869960
 PLAY BY MAIL INFORMATION LINE: 0898 555 077 (Calls charged at 38p off peak, 44p at all other times, per minute)

THE POWER IN YOUR HAND TO COMMAND THE FUTURE...

Beyond the Stellar Empire is a sophisticated and challenging Play by Mail Science Fiction Game in which you can compete and interact with many other Real Opponents from all parts of the UK and beyond.

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR OWN DESTINY WHILE YOU:

- ◆ Explore the Universe
- ◆ Colonise new Worlds
- ◆ Investigate new Planets and confront Alien forces
- ◆ Fight in Interstellar Wars
- ◆ Play Galactic Power Politics
- ◆ Upgrade your Starship's capabilities
- ... and much more!

KJC is the largest and most advanced Play by Mail Games company in Europe.
 Start with the best and send now for your **FREE** Beyond the Stellar Empire Training Manual and 1st game turn.

You'll soon be Hooked!

Kingdom Design

Fourth generation Alamaze with all web-based interaction

Rick McDowell



If you are thinking about playing a “PBM game” you are not familiar with and that your friends haven’t played, well, why should you play? You exhale, thinking, this is going to be some work.

PBM games are complicated! There may be 60 pages or more of rules, but there are some with only 4 pages though I don’t quite understand those, as paradoxical as that might sound.

Let us assume you are thinking you might want to take on a new PBM style game: you are back in the saddle again. You know what you like, which I will assume means a fairly deep game of strategy, at intervals processed simultaneously, where the attraction is to both hope for both your tactical choices and the purveyor’s

program producing perfect execution, your strategic outlook considering many possible scenarios that may unfold and your superior utilization of resources, and as reward for serious play, in turn receiving results that both make sense and enthrall. Most importantly, joining a strategy game that draws you in more deeply with each turn, where each turn new knowledge is gained, and more possibilities unfold. In a great game there are no “meh” turns and you must be focused, carefully choosing from among dozens of potentially viable orders to produce that perfect set of commands. Intimidated? No? Good, you are our kind.

In my game of that type (Alamaze), you choose both a kingdom from among 24 available including some staples

like Dwarves, Elves, Dark Elves...well, that's about all the expected ones, or Tyrant of Gor, Warlock, Sorcerer, Necromancer, Atlantians, Underworld, Pirates, Gnomes, Sacred Order, Black Dragons and at least a dozen others.

You choose your kingdom carefully, considering its strength not just as a number but across its characters and kingdom traits, along military, economic, covert, magical, divine and esoteric characteristics. Of course, who doesn't?

Now you pick your region in Maelstrom, the continent in play. There are 12 to choose from, each with different characteristics. There are Capital Regions, Free Trade Regions, City States, Savage Regions. Which terrain mix is preferred? Major city like in the large capital regions, or more secluded island regions? Lots of coast and sea, or perhaps more mountains or forest?

In Alamaze, kingdoms are defined primarily by more than 24 Cultural Traits, as well as terrain adeptness, magical proficiency, and special abilities. Each kingdom is very much distinct.

As The Underworld, you feature intrigue and have special orders unavailable to other kingdoms. You will steal, assassinate, kidnap, and reveal skeletons in the closet on your enemies. As the Atlantians, you can control the seas and have powerful nobles to usurp control of PC's. As Red Dragon, all fear you will bring your wrath to their kingdom as even cities with high walls hardly concern you.

Alamaze perhaps has gained most distinction by differentiating its kingdoms and letting wildly different strategies succeed in the right hands. Despite so many gigantic differences between kingdoms across all aspects of play, and so many thousands of possibilities with any kingdom in any region, no kingdom has become dominant or shunned, and the same can be said of the regions.

Alamaze is famous for not just staying power for 30 years and the design and interface enhancements through four generations that sustains that appeal, but for the quality of its elements - including its magic system, where each kingdom has unique spell lists over nine levels of power. That's just a hint on one aspect of Alamaze. Your brigades will gain experience and become veteran

and with further success rise to be elite. Your leaders will rise from captain to general to marshal in increments and may eventually become game-changing Warlords. Your agents at the highest level can enter the castle of your enemy and slit the throat of their king. Your wizards will rise in power to cast incredible magic.

But all this will not overwhelm you, you instead will be drawn in. Alamaze will flow over you, and you may join those with us that have played on for decades, always discovering something new. Its been around now after winning Game of the Year at Origins and GAMA, for 30 years, now in its fourth generation with all web-based interaction (no snail mail).

Find us at www.alamaze.co. Signup there. You are never asked for credit card info and won't be invoiced until after you do the tutorial, and at least

one Duel (against likely a mentor), and only when you get it your first game that begins are you then invoiced for \$9.95 for a month. Yes, ten turns in a month for \$9.95. You owe it to yourself to give Alamaze a look. There is nothing to risk.

See you soon!

**Rick
Alamaze Designer**



www.Alamaze.co

[Alamaze forum](#)

[Sign Up for Alamaze](#)

ALAMAZE

... Return to the Lands of your Fathers ...





The Isles

The Game of Outcasts

“It is now Thirty Years since the gates were opened and the dregs of humanity were released into our Towns and Citys. They were anonymous - they emerged from their prisons confused and despairing into a World they had no memory of. No-one claimed them as their own and nobody wanted them. We expected them to die. We thought they would slowly disappear, absorbed into our lands as beggars and thieves with little if any prospect of making a life for themselves. Our Lords reassured us that these ‘Outcasts’ were nithings and as such were lesser than we who had prospered here for hundreds of years amongst our islands.

They told us that everything would turn out right. They Lied. Now the gates are again opened and these ‘beggars and thieves’ are to be forced upon us again”

Guild Master Brion, of the Ilanthor Merchants Guild



Free to Play, The Isles is a hand-moderated Fantasy RPG Play By Mail game, set in a frontier town on the edge of the Wilds.

As a newly-released Prisoner you have many options ; Become a beggar or a thief as they expect you to be, or strive to be greater : You can become a leader, an adventurer, a dabbler in the Grey Arts or a follower of a local deity. You could live out your life in obscurity, happy to be alive - or you could rise to become a thorn in the side of those who imprisoned you and stole your memories

For details Visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/theislesPBM>



TAKAMO - The Legacy Game

Kgruppe LLC, has been running an invitation only version of the original Takamo, a strategic science fiction Play-By-Email game for several years while we continue development of a multiplayer online version. From time to time we receive requests to join the legacy game from former Takamo players. Those applications are normally accepted. We also occasionally receive applications from folks who have never played Takamo. Usually, we do not accept those requests. The reason for the distinction is the state of the old Takamo rule book. The rule book is out of date because we have spent our time on development of the new version rather than take the time to completely revise and update the old game. Veteran Takamo players are familiar enough with game play that a quick update regarding rule changes is sufficient to bring them up to speed, while the uninitiated player seems to have a great deal of trouble understanding the old rules.

The previous explanation notwithstanding, we (the development team) are now considering a full revision of the Takamo legacy rule book for the purpose of opening one or more commercial Takamo galaxies. There seems to be enough interest in retro games that we are willing to put in the man hours needed to bring the game current and jump back into the world of commercial PBEM games. Whether this will happen depends on the response from the public and the resources we can spare to get the game back in shape.

So, if you have an interest in playing the PBEM version of Takamo, drop me a line at ritnourlaw@gmail.com

Randall Ritnour
Kgruppe LLC



TURN REPORT

Starting Location:

Docked at IEM STARBASE Palmetto (4100) - Yank System (146)

*TU 300: Take Off

Entered orbit of Shaka (945)

Scanned:

- BIP SHIP DEARATIC OVERSTATED (1138) - (30 Light Hulls)
Barge Class Freighter (No Armour)
- CNF STARBASE SARAJEVO (2674) - (11-5) 6342 kMu - Report
Controlled by
- IEM STARBASE BALMORAL (4100) - (P-0) 6222 kMu - Report
- APT STARBASE PORALIS (4546) - (10-4) 558 kMu - Report
- FCX SHIP FF HOLD THE PLATE (2494) - (30 Light Hulls)
Barge Class Freighter (No Armour)
- CNF SHIP DARNFOLD HUNTER 2 (12612) - (30 Normal Hulls)
Heavier Class Heavy Cruiser (Medium Relative Armour)
- EU Starship TRAP (14200) - (30 Light Hulls)
Barge Class Freighter (No Armour)
- EU Starship TRAP (14200) - (30 Light Hulls)
Barge Class Freighter (No Armour)

Forum Posts

Group	Topic	Location	View
General	What makes you #1 again?	Discussions (100)	10000
Rules	Swallow Management	Game Development	Star 5 10000
General	Game Server Reliability	Announcements	Public 1
General	117 show where they should be...	Player Discussion (1)	500
Rules	Yank's Favorite Ship	Game Development	Star 5 10000
Rules	update to star 4.0?	Game Development	Star 5 10000
General	How Good - Awarded to you at 200 awards	Player Discussion (1)	500
Rules	100-400	Game Development	Star 5 10000
Rules	100-400	Game Development	Star 5 10000

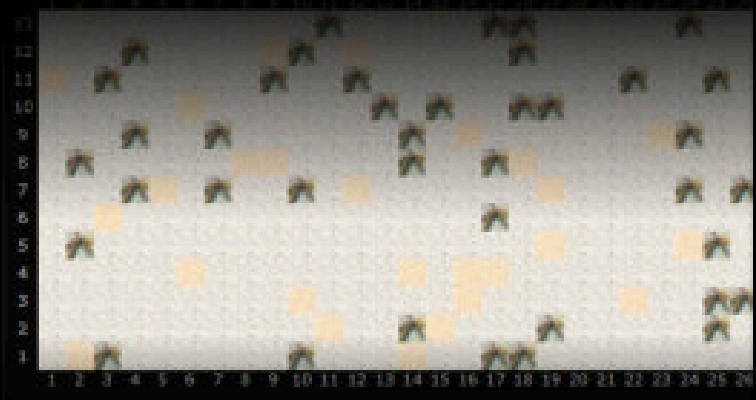
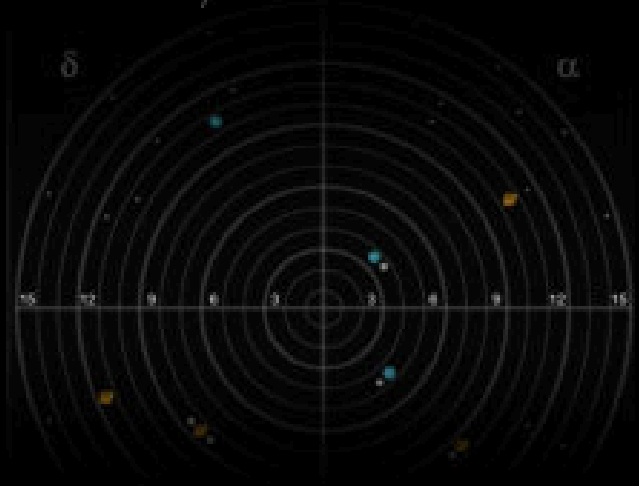
KJC GAMES

presents



phoenix

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE



Planetary Data

Star Name: [] Size: [] Temperature: []

<http://www.phoenixbse.com>

Better Versus More

A Paradigm Shift In PhoenixBSE

Mica Goldstone

Here at KJC Games we are busy preparing for the November Phoenix pubmeet. For those not in the know this event has been held here in Blackpool at the end of the Illuminations for over 20 years.

Player have come from all over the world to drink beer, swap stories, make deals and tell us their ideas for the future of the game and opinions on the game at present.

It is not just about feedback as each year we give a presentation on the ongoing developments within the game over the coming months and years. While some of the presentation covers forthcoming developments that have been pretty much nailed down, we also include ideas and proposals that we are less certain about. The pubmeet gives the attendees, as stakeholder, players and representatives of their factions the opportunity to kick the

proposals about, explore how the mechanics could affect the game and suggest refinements, shoot them down in flames and very occasionally give them their wholehearted support.



**PHOENIX
BSE**

Over the past few years we have been concentrating on planetary development as the game has moved from setting up bases on newly explored worlds to fully colonising them, representing significant investments. This has raised new points on attacking and conversely defending the

populations along with the whole aspect of securing entire worlds with planetary shields and orbital gates.

We are now pushing the theme by developing political influence and adding depth to alien cultures. As the game has evolved from players running a handful of ships hundreds and potentially thousands, we are

looking at ways of refining shipping. We will be exploring options for both freighting and warfleets to account for differences in preferred playing styles. These will largely cater for players that would rather run fewer more specialised ships.

This paradigm shift towards better vs more is something we are also pushing in planetside combat. We will be revealing streamlined mechanics that are both more intuitive and fun. We are looking to rebalance the less popular power gaming aspects that have steadily evolved with cool roleplaying themes that have become somewhat overshadowed.

All this together with beer, board-games, secret deals, anecdotes, more beer and a fair few takeaways and pub meals makes for a great weekend.



PhoenixBSE Affiliations

Association of Free Traders

Detinus Republic

Dewiek Elder Nation

Eldar Rawk Conclave

Falconian Republic

Felini Elamite Autonomy

Felini Tyranny

Flagritz Empire

Frontier Exploration & Trade

Galactic Trade & Transport

Imperial Services

Independent

Krell

Krell Clan Black Rat

Stellar Mining and Smelting

www.phoenixbse.com



Can your clan survive and become
a civilization?

TribenNet

Build! **Farm!** **Grow your clan!** **Negotiation!**
Trade! **Sail the seas!** **Diplomacy!**
Explore! **War!**

TribenNet accurately simulates a nomadic life and lets you choose where it may lead. The potential and possibilities are endless!

It's up to you!

PBeM - Spiele

Die Welt der E-Mail Spiele

Jason Oates' Games

presents



COMPANY COMMANDER

Where we're heading. . .

Where do I even begin?

It's really late, here - almost three in the morning, Eastern Standard Time. It's been both a good week and a challenging week. A lot has happened, since the release of the last issue, and as I type these words to you - *our readership* - I already know that Issue #19 is almost done and ready for publication. The heavy lifting for this issue is already done, and my eyes already begin to drift ahead to Issue #20.

I have spent some time, this week, contemplating our existence as a PBM magazine. I have reflected upon what our role actually is, upon what I want it to be. More importantly, though, what do YOU want it to be?

Honestly, I'm probably the worst choice in the world for this job, for this task of steering a PBM magazine, of all things, into the future. After all, what do I know about any of it?

The blind leading the blind comes to mind. *We're flying blind, here, people!* And that, my dear PBM-playing friends, is a sobering thought.

And just like that, I encounter some kind of a computer problem, and I end up having to restart the software from scratch. Looks like I only lost about a paragraph or so, but I take it as an omen, and the direction of my thoughts now changes.

Whatever the role that Suspense & Decision, specifically, and PlayByMail.Net, generally, may play in and through and across the realm of play by mail gaming, one thing that is not its role is the policing of whatever everyone else in the hobby does.

I am not in any position to correct every error, nor to right every wrong. I cannot compel either the entirety of PBM gaming or the individual elements, thereof,

to behave themselves with gentlemanly perfection. I neither make law, nor uphold it. At most, I am subject to it. What I can ill-afford to allow is for the minutae of distractions to overtake and consume me.

I try to publish a little magazine, in order to help grow a hobby and an industry that, quite frankly, suffers from more than just a little wear, tear, and neglect. I'm a lot older than I used to be (But fortunately, still a lot younger than some, thank the good LORD!), And for some odd and seemingly inexplicable reason, I feel called to allocate some of the last years of my life to a little cause called PBM.

Why? Who knows? Who can truly say?

Granted, some will no doubt view what I am trying to do to be a waste of time. And the worst part of it all is that I genuinely do not know what I am doing. I'm just an average and ordinary person that is struggling to adapt and to improvise as I go along. And if you want to

know the truth about it, I'm failing quite miserably at it.

Yet, even still, I persevere!

I would ask you to persevere, as well. I really do think that PBM is primed for a comeback. I would sure hate for you to miss it.

There used to be a PBM company called Cyborg Games. It was run by a guy called Frank Coker. It was really great to hear back from Frank, recently. He



used to run a PBM game called The Next Empire.

I've never played it. Yet, the advertisement from days of old still calls out to me. It still entices me, even to this very day.

It was a PBM game that billed itself as the future of PBM gaming. And for just an ad, it sure did speak persuasively, in a visual sense. All these many years later, and that quasi-terminator looking guy still strikes me as one of the most visually impactful

images in all of play by mail gaming history. Honestly, I still love the way that it looks!

But that game is no more, and I sure do wish that Frank Coker would tell us what happened. From what

I understand, Frank was recently looking through a box of The Next Empire materials, including ads. I know that for a fact, because it was Frank Coker, himself, who told me that.

When did he tell me this? Back on August 19, 2019.

He was responding to a PM that I sent to him on Facebook two and a half years before, back on January 19, 2017.

Who knows? Maybe Frank was right, when he said that something was afoot, here.

WE ARE THE FUTURE OF PBM GAMING!

THE NEXT EMPIRE

Join the revolution! Find out how TNE is changing PBM. Learn why TNE was voted the #1 PBM game by players in a recent nationwide magazine survey. Startlingly detailed laser graphics each turn; "smart" customized order sheets; unsurpassed gaming complexity to challenge your imagination: it's all part of TNE. And Cyborg Games offers you the customer support you deserve, like individual attention and double entry of your orders for increased accuracy, so you can make the most of every turn.

\$7.50 per turn.
\$20 for set-up, manual and first two turns.
Fast (2 week) or Slow (3 week).

Cyborg Games Inc.
Department F4
P.O. Box 71019
Milwaukee, WI 53211
(414) 332-1966

MasterCard and VISA accepted

I can hear my navel-gazing critics, now. "What does any of this have to do with where we are heading?"

In a nutshell - *Everything!*

PBM gaming does have a future, and we're headed to it. You. Me. All of us! Let's

just hope that we're not headed there in a hand-basket.

In the coming months, you'll be treated to more and more issues of this magazine. As we roll past 2019 and into 2020, experimentation will continue. Who knows? You might even begin to see things such as bumper stickers, t-shirts, and even print copies of Suspense & Decision.

Who knows? I may even decide to transition from treating PBM as a hobby, and take more of a business approach to it. I may even incorporate. Indeed, perhaps I already should have. It isn't really about making money, though. Rather, it is to explore the generation of revenue streams that can then be reinvested back into the primary objective - *which is to grow the overall player base of PBM gaming.*

I know, I know. It's just foolish, right? The foolish rantings of an old man with too much time on his hands. Maybe it is.

Every fiber of my being tells me, for instance, that I can use crowd funding to generate funds to pay for artists to draw original art to adorn interior pages of S&D with. Funding goals for crowd funding campaigns do not have to be set at exorbitant levels. Anything would be more than gets invested for that purpose, currently.

Crowd funding can also be used to pay people to author articles for future issues. Still think I'm crazy? Once upon a few years ago, I invested a bit of time studying a bunch of Kickstarter campaigns, trying to figure out what helped make various Kickstarters to succeed or fail. Honestly, I think that there are some common denominators.

And, you know, nothing says that PBM companies and GMs can't use crowdfunding to take their own gaming operations to the next level. Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo, Inc. understood this. He grasped it. *More importantly, he demonstrated it!*

Yet, we still live in a day and an age when well-established and long-standing PBM companies still remain content with taking what seems to me to be a very casual approach.

Again, you ask, "But where are we heading, though?"

We are heading to the Rubicon - *and we are going to cross it, my friends!*

We are going to cross from the past of PBM to the future of PBM, and we are going to do it, together, some grudgingly and others receptively.

And to be honest with you, it's really something that I definitely don't want to allow myself to get distracted from.

Many years ago, PBM legend Bob McLain authored an article titled, "[Play By Mail: The Infancy Of Cyberspace.](#)" In it, one thing that he wrote really stood out to me, recently, as I was re-reading it for the God-only-knows-how-many time. What he said was this: "*No one, it seems, has the time or the money to expand the*

frontier."

What happens, though, if you factor in a guy with too much time on his hands, combined with the concept and the power of crowd funding?

Certainly, I don't have the money to rebuild the PBM industry and the hobby. And more than likely, neither do you. Money isn't what motivates me, though, and with crowd funding, the world will open their wallets and their purses to support concepts and ideas, that new realities may be created, thereby.

Then again, what do I know? A new golden era of PBM gaming is just a pipe dream, after all, isn't it?

Energy is building, even if not everyone is fully aware of it, yet. Pardon me, now, as I listen to a rendition of *I Dreamed A Dream* from a performance called *Les Misérables*.

Won't you join me?

Happy gaming! Dare to always dream the impossible dream!

What did they say about Issue #18?

That was an enjoyable read.

Glad to see it back again.

For now, just wanted to congratulate you for getting out Issue 18 and great job.

You did it again, Charles! What is dead may never die!

I know of several people who have tried various games including TribeNet due to reading about them in S&D so something is working.

It's a really nice issue with rich, interesting, well written and edited content. Hats off to you. It's a lot of work.



I just finished reading #18. I loved it. The dedication was moving but also inspirational. I had honestly lost hope that there was still an interest in PBM games and Board Games these days, as the Video Game/Tablet/I Phone generation blaze they're way through war with high def graphics and slick synthesized soundtracks.... but to know that there is still blood in these old veins has been a boost to my once tired morale.

Long Live the PBM Games! And Long Live Suspense & Decision!!!

Enjoyed issue #18 very much, partly because my name and a couple of pictures of our Vegas MEPBM Face to Face game made it into the issue (great article by Raven) but I also enjoy hearing news about other games and happenings in our PBM genre.

It looks great! Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication to this hobby. Thank you for coming back to S&D after a nearly two-year break. You are the modern-day Sisyphus, and the rock-rollin' is greatly appreciated. I came back to the hobby six months after Issue #17 was published, and felt like I was coming back to a hobby that everyone else had already given up on, so I can't tell you how delighted I was when you posted on the Facebook group on August 5th to sign up for the new mailing list.