Suspense & Decision

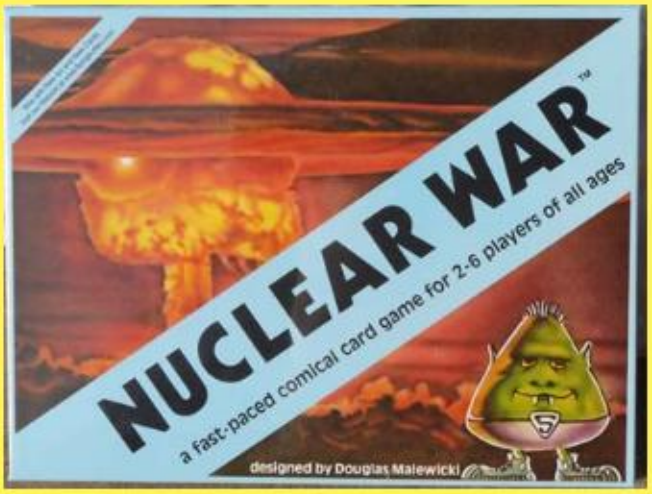
2014
APRIL

Issue
#6

Is NUCLEAR WAR unavoidable?

Is Nuclear Escalation inevitable? Is Nuclear Proliferation inescapable? Are Weapons of Mass Destruction ever going to be found?

We don't know either, but we do know that the card game NUCLEAR WAR is the most fun you'll ever find in a box that size.



Originally Invented in 1965, this game makes fun of the very idea of trying to "win" a Nuclear War. 2014 marks the 49th Anniversary of the invention of this hilarious game. **Watch our website for news of the special 50th Anniversary edition.**

Nuclear War has THREE expansion sets: Nuclear Escalation, Nuclear Proliferation, and Weapons of Mass Destruction. All these games should be available at your favorite local game store. If not, you can find them on our webpage at www.flylngbuffalo.com or you can mail us a check or money order (add $5 postage if you are in the USA, or $19 postage for outside the USA).

We accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express, and Paypal.

Suggested US retail prices:
Nuclear War - $29.95
Nuclear Escalation - $29.95
Nuclear Proliferation - $29.95
Weapons of Mass Destruction - $19.95

Flying Buffalo, Inc.

P.O. Box 8467
Scottsdale, AZ 85252

www.flyingbuffalo.com

games@flyingbuffalo.com

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Articles

2 Magazine Meets Ragnarok: Is Suspense & Decision doomed by burnout?

11 Interview: Tom Fyfe

15 Khoraja: Hyborian War Kingdom Spotlight

25 Balancing the Blade: Adjudicating Table Top RPGs through the Mail

30 The Development Cycle: Pub meets and improvements for Phoenix:BSE

39 The Bigger Picture: A Better Understanding of PlayByMail.Net

45 The Top Five Game Designers of Our Generation

52 Online Roleplaying Communities: The collaborative element in MMORPGs

60 Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail

62 Where We're Headed

66 PBM Activity Corner

71 To Spur Them Over The Ice: The Origin of a PBM Gamer

77 How to Make Players and Influence Friends: Extending a Hand To PBM Noobs

The PBM Industry Awards

The Statistical Excellence Award that was announced for KJC Games in Issue # 5 of Suspense & Decision magazine was awarded in recognition of information provided by that company's programmer, who goes by the name of Darak on the Phoenix:BSE forum. The true current size of the overall PBM player base remains an elusive figure. Darak's example of transparency warrants commendation.

SUSPENSE & DECISION

ISSUE # 6

April 2014

Published by: PlayByMail.Net ©2014

Managing Editor:
Charles Mosteller
Assistant Editor:
Bernd Jaehnigen
Staff Writer:
Jim Kemeny
Cover Artist:
A. Kaviraj

Balance is restored, and harmony returns to the play by mail gaming universe, once more, as Issue # 6 finally materializes in the eager hands of its waiting digital readership.

Ah, the profundity of the moment!

I know what you're thinking, though. You're a glutton for punishment, and you want to slay a few words, yourself. You have an eye on an article that you want to write, and you're right on the verge of begging me - begging anyone - for the chance to unleash that verbosity beast that dwells deep within you.

You'll have to fight your way past the throng already gathered at my electronic gate, first. Your article will have to find its way through the omnipresent avalanche of articles that I pull at random from the stack, each time.

Seriously, though, send me something. Send your email to:

GrimFinger@GrimFinger.Net

Magazine Meets Ragnarok

Is Suspense & Decision doomed by burnout?

Charles Mosteller

The Great Concern, if I may call it that, shared by numerous individuals who have provided feedback to me about this magazine since its very first issue, has been the issue of burnout.

I have been cautioned time after time, again and again, to not let the pace of publication of Suspense & Decision lead to burnout. The fear, it seems, is that a monthly rate of publication will invariably and inevitably lead to burnout.

Indeed, it may. It just might. But, speaking from the perspective of being the one who publishes it, it really isn't the prospect of burnout that concerns me nearly so much as other things do. If the continued survival of Suspense & Decision is the worry, speaking as both the Managing Editor and Publisher of the magazine in question (namely, this one), I can think of numerous other things that pose a far greater threat to the continued publication of this magazine than burnout.

Honestly, I don't even know if I would include burnout within a Top 5 list of potential threats most likely to bring the publication run of this magazine to a grinding halt.

The single biggest threat to this magazine's continued existence is the prospect of absence of content. In other words, submissions of articles, advertisements, and other material that I can use to publish each and every issue. Far too many readers and game moderators, alike, seem to think that the flow of content to the magazine is assured. Yet, it isn't. Nothing could be further from the truth, in fact.

The sheer number of individuals who genuinely seem to like the magazine a lot is substantially greater than the number of individuals actually bothering to send something in for me to include as content for all readers to enjoy.

The single best way to ensure that the magazine continues well into the future is for people who enjoy it to participate in submitting material for me to populate the pages with. Complacency, when it comes to submitting material for publication, could unquestionably lead to the magazine's demise.

A core readership base for the magazine's content has already sprung into existence. Six issues out, now, numerous individuals across a fairly wide spectrum have already become accustomed to downloading and reading each new issue. That's not to say that, when they do, they necessarily just start signing up for new PBM games to play. Rather, they find the subject matter interesting, and they continue to want more of it.

Recently, I was told that a 100+ page issue was a bad idea. Personally, I thought that it was a damned fine idea, but clearly, not everyone agrees with me. Being very early in the magazine's life span, the object is to build interest. The mere fact that we were able to offer a triple digit issue, and so soon in the publication sequence, is not something

that I regret in the least.

Indeed, if at some point, I decide to close up shop and shutter the digital presses from whence Suspense & Decision emanates, then so be it, regardless of whatever the reason to end the magazine's publication run might prove to be. But, at least let it not be said that we didn't dare to dream big on at least one occasion.

The prospect of failure is a real one. It ever remains our constant companion on this journey from page to page and from issue to issue. It is something that will always be with us. No doubt about that. None at all.

Yet, is doubt something that I want to chain the publication of future issues to? If Suspense & Decision's ultimate fate, it's eventual destiny, is to be only a short run magazine, then what of it? By God, at least our readers, some of them if not all of them, feel that there is an actual, honest-to-God PBM magazine in existence, once again.

God doesn't promise us tomorrow. Neither do I promise anyone a ten year run, nor a five year run, nor even a two year run. The immediate goal before me is to try and publish at least one full year's worth of issues. This issue, in fact, marks our arrival at the halfway point of that goal.

If you were to roll back the clock and the calendar, who out there would have imagined only a single year ago that we would be where we are, today, with this magazine?

More than one previous PBM magazine couldn't meet established bi-monthly publication deadlines. Yet, here we are, six issues into our run as a digital publication, and how many of our readers have had to wait even a single extra month to read the issue of our magazine that they were waiting on? Not a single, solitary one, insofar as I know.

Have we met every deadline, to date? Nope, not at all. But, where others chose to measure deadlines in terms of months, I have chosen to measure them in mere days or hours or minutes.

I can - and do - appreciate the fact that those who caution me to be careful about getting burned out, due to the frequency of publication or due to the page count of particular issues harbor a concern that this magazine has value, and that their natural desire is to guard against what seems to them to be a very likely and tangible threat to this magazine's continued existence. They like the magazine. They perceive it to have at least some merit. They want it to continue.

But, I submit to these very same individuals that the stakes warrant a bolder approach than to them might seem most prudent.

At six issues, we're barely out of the starting gate, and I'm already being admonished to pull back on the reins. Why?

Some of what I personally feel to be amongst the very best of ideas for the magazine haven't even been implemented, yet, but I should slow things down? How slow does everyone want me to dial it back to? How about once a year? How about once every five years?

My gut instinct tells me that offering readers and gamers more is a better approach than offering them less. I have no doubt that others would do things differently, if it were them instead of me being the one doing the deciding on such things. If we're not willing to risk burnout, then what will we risk?

Machiavelli - http://ustp.asciiking.com
It's Diplomacy with the gloves off.

At Face Value

A look at the Facebook numbers

April 30th, 2014

Facebook Page	# of Likes
Flying Buffalo, Inc.	1,401 Likes (+12)
Empires at War 1805	349 Likes (+8)
Takamo Universe	232 Likes (+24)
Clash of Legends	113 Likes (+5)
Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire	95 Likes (+6)
Diplomacy on USAK	83 Likes (+1)
Starweb	82 Likes (0)
Rolling Thunder Games	66 Likes (+1)
Duel2	65 Likes (+2)
Fallen Empires PBE	39 Likes (+1)
Rimworlds	35 Likes (0)
Galactic Prisoners	29 Likes (+2)
Alamaze	27 Likes (+1)
It's a Crime	26 Likes (+2)
PlayByMail.Net	15 Likes (+6)

April 30, 2014

Facebook Discussion Group	# of members
Hyborian War	52 members (0)
Middle-Earth PBM	45 members (-2)
Phoenix BSE	36 members (+1)
Forgotten Realms	37 members (+2)
Legends	30 members (0)
Starfleet Warlord	30 members (+4)
Science Fiction Writers and Artists Group for Takamo Universe	24 members (0)
Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive	22 members (0)
Lands of Nevron	19 members (0)
Duel2	11 members (+2)
Fall of Rome	2 members (0)
Play By Mail Games	1 member (0)

*** NOTE: The numbers in parenthesis reflects increases, decreases, and maintaining of the status quo since the previous issue. N/A denotes an entry that was added, this issue.**

OMEGA ONLINE. INITIATE PRIME DIRECTIVE. ACTIVE.

TERMINATION SEQUENCE. ACQUIRE TARGETS.

COUNTDOWN HAS COMMENCED.

E R A D I C A T E.

PROJECTED BIO-LIFEFORM SURVIVAL RATE: 0.00%

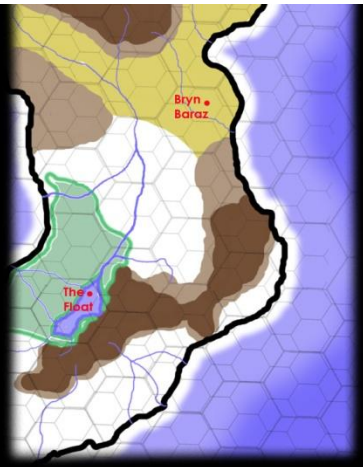
Terminate your boredom!

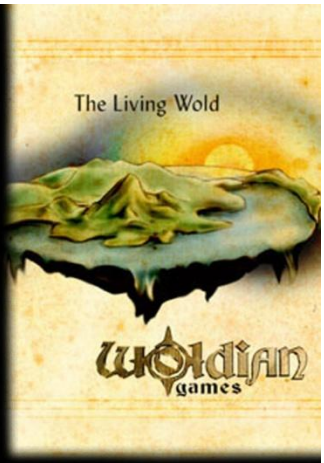
Play Takamo for FREE

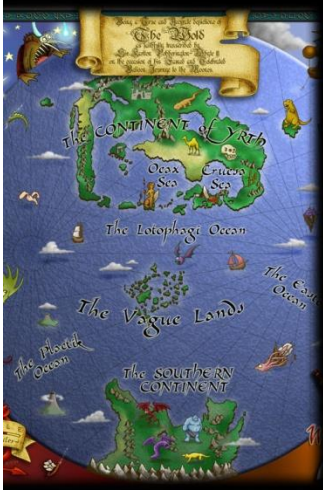
SPREAD CYBERNETIC DESTRUCTION ACROSS THE FIVE GALAXIES

* Player-created ad for the game, Takamo Universe.

Image copyright © 2013 Kgruppe LLC







762 Great Reasons To Try Woldiangames.com

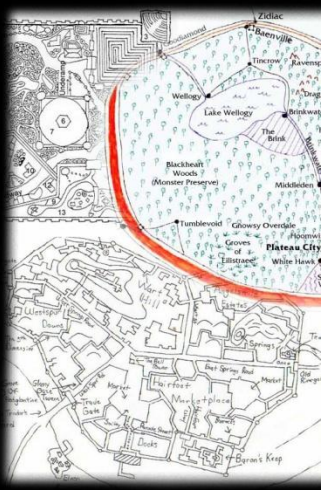
- Four unique character races.
- Two new base classes, 30 new prestige classes.
- Eight custom domains, 14 feats, 15 magic items.
- Two pantheons, 11 gods, 12 immortal powers.
- 11 planes replacing the standard D&D cosmology.
- A 571-page wiki full of campaign lore.
- 18 years of continuous play online since 1996.
- Eight Pathfinder games with eight PCs each.
- It costs $0.00 to play! Absolutely free!

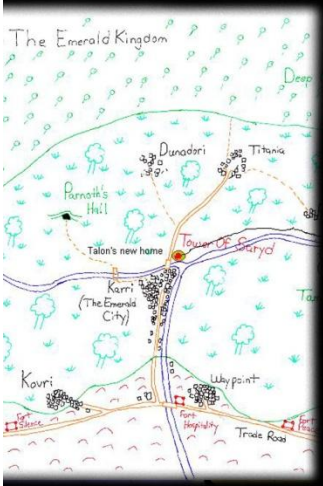
Featuring daily **play-by-post gaming** for good-aligned heroes, the Wold is a friendly community of creative gamers. There's no application, no tryout, and no charge, so just join!

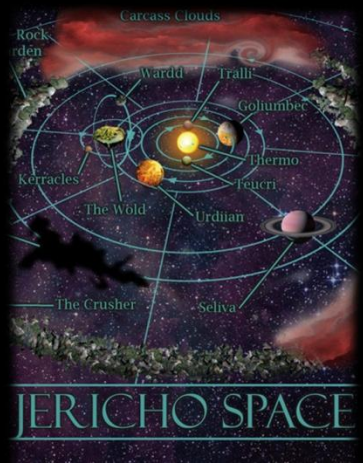
Email cayzle@cayzle.com or gericko@gmail.com.

It's your five minute daily D&D fix!

WOLDIAN GAMES







Suspense & Decision

A look at the download numbers

November 2013

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	38

December 2013

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	445
Issue # 2	223

January 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	71
Issue # 2	193

February 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	122
Issue # 2	144
Issue # 3	490
Issue # 4	13

March 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	99
Issue # 2	90
Issue # 3	98
Issue # 4	452

April 2014

Issue Number	# of complete downloads
Issue # 1	223
Issue # 2	126
Issue # 3	149
Issue # 4	150
Issue # 5	642

Total # of issues downloaded to date = 3,768

Issue # 1 = 998	Issue # 2 = 776	Issue # 3 = 737
Issue # 4 = 615	Issue # 5 = 642	

Resurgent in 2014!

Dragon Magazine
Issue #131
"Alamaze is a treat. Speaking as a game designer, it's one of the finest designs I've seen. I like it and recommend it to experienced gamers."

White Wolf Magazine
Issue #11
"Alamaze is possibly the finest play by mail game in existence. It is certainly the most innovative design since the first PBM game emerged... It should be tried by anyone who considers himself a real gamer."

Paper Mayhem Magazine
Issue #19
"Alamaze has all the strategy, intrigue, fear and paranoia that makes a great game. It's a great value."

Flagship Magazine
Issue #11
"Alamaze is one of the finest PBM games on the market, today. It is fast paced and exciting. It is full of all the action, intrigue and role-playing any player could ask for."

Paper Mayhem Magazine
Issue #28
"Among the many innovations in Alamaze is the truly fantastic magic system, unequaled anywhere in PBM. Not only does the magic system fit in with the entire game system hand-in-hand, it also shows the depth and massive amounts of designing and programming time spent lavishly in this game."

Alamaze is back with refreshed rules, our new Resurgent Map, new custom game formats, twice-weekly turns, a great value subscription at $19.95 a month for about 7 turns – less than $3 a turn. Our players have started more than 50 games in the last year and created more than 10,000 forum posts. Destiny beckons: Return to Alamaze!

Visit the website and Signup at: **www.alamaze.co**

Register for the Alamaze forum and claim your kingdom at: **www.kingdomsofarcania.net**

The ONE RING module in the Legends game system

ORIGINS AWARDS

Legends 2004
Gamer's Choice

Legends 2011
The ONE RING

pbm@harlequingames.com

Interview: Tom Fyfe

Flagship magazine's deckhand on deck

Interviewed by: Charles Mosteller

Q. When did you get your start in Play By Mail?

After College, a few of us wanted to carry on gaming, so we started to game by post.

Q. What was the very first PBM game that you ever played, and what was that experience like, as you look back on it, now?

First PBM, erm.. Midhir, I think it was. It was amazing, at the time, I wasn't really into computer games/MMO's as much as I am, now, and the experience of hand-drawn maps and typed back turn record sheets was great. It had that Roleplaying Game feel, without actually being face to face.

Q. Have you ever worked for any PBM game companies, and if so, which ones, and what was your role at each of them?

Yea, Timewyrm, I was assistant designer/general dog's body .

Q. Have you ever designed any PBM games?

Yes.

Q. When did you get involved with Flagship magazine, and how long were you involved with it?

I helped out Carol with some of the layout/desktop publishing, after Ken, her partner, passed. Prior to that, I was a subscriber/advertiser.

Q. How would you describe Flagship's contribution to Play By Mail gaming?

It was a mainstay, the industry magazine, as far as I was aware. It did a lot for the game, holding conventions, bringing people together.

Q. What was the last PBM game that you played, and what prompted you to start playing it?

Lord of the Rings, or whatever the game was (bad with names) run by the Cardiff Boys. I started playing, because I was really into the whole mythos of Middle Earth at the time, and the game appealed to me.

Q. What kind of PBM games appeal to you?

These days, the glow of the pretty screen has captured me, and MMOs. But, back then, it had to spark my imagination, draw me into the world and it's lore.

Q. What do you think was the very best PBM game of all time, and why do you believe it to be the best?

Personally, though with a little bias, as I then came to help run it. Midhir. It was a world game of epic scale. To give it a computer industry analogy, it was along the lines of the Civ series of games. It had its own markets, it's own wars, dictators, politicians, and explorers.

Q. What qualities do you believe that a PBM game needs to incorporate into its design, in order to prove successful?

Now or then? Now, it needs to do more than you can do on a computer. It needs to give you something special, make you feel part of the world, make you feel like you are being taken on a journey personally by the GM. Even though you might be just one player of many, you need to feel like the GM is talking to only you, when you get your turn back. Most of that is what I'd think makes any PBM successful, then and now. Though getting your turn back quickly, writing orders simply also help, but that's just an efficiency aspect.

Q. Of the PBM games that you are aware of and remember, which ones stand out to you as milestones in the development of game design in the postal genre of gaming?

En Garde, Lord of the Rings, are two, the one by KJC, it seemed simple, yet was a success.

Q. If you were going to create a new PBM game from scratch, what genre would it be from?

Sci-Fi, probably, these days, more scope less constraints.

Q. What were some of the PBM magazines from the past that stand out in your mind, and what makes them stand out as memorable to you?

The only other magazine that I can think of other than Flagship, was Games Without Frontiers, and that was run by myself and Colin Forbes, for a while.

Q. Aside from PBM games, what are some of your personal favorite gaming interests?

I'm not a PBMer any more, sad to say. I'm into MMO's and other computer games. Much easier to get that instant fix. I think I've grown away from the PBM.

Q. PBM game or otherwise, what do you think is the best game, hands down, of any game ever created in any genre of medium of delivery?

Taking the 5th. But, Eve Online is probably the most Epic, with the largest scope. I started playing in October 2005, and have continued to play off and on, since. It keeps drawing me back.

Q. What are some of the worst PBM games that you ever tried, and what about them made you feel that they should fall into that category?

Don't think I really played any bad games.

Q. Do you believe that PBM gaming has a future, and if so, what do you think that it will look like in years to come?

It has to compete with the shiny console and PC market for people's attention. PBeM has a chance with that, so long as it doesn't lose its roots.

Q. If you had to do your time in PBM all over again, what would you have done differently, and why?

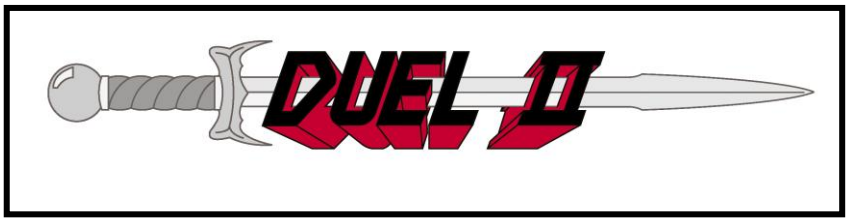
Nothing, maybe run my games a little more efficiently, but really don't have any regrets.

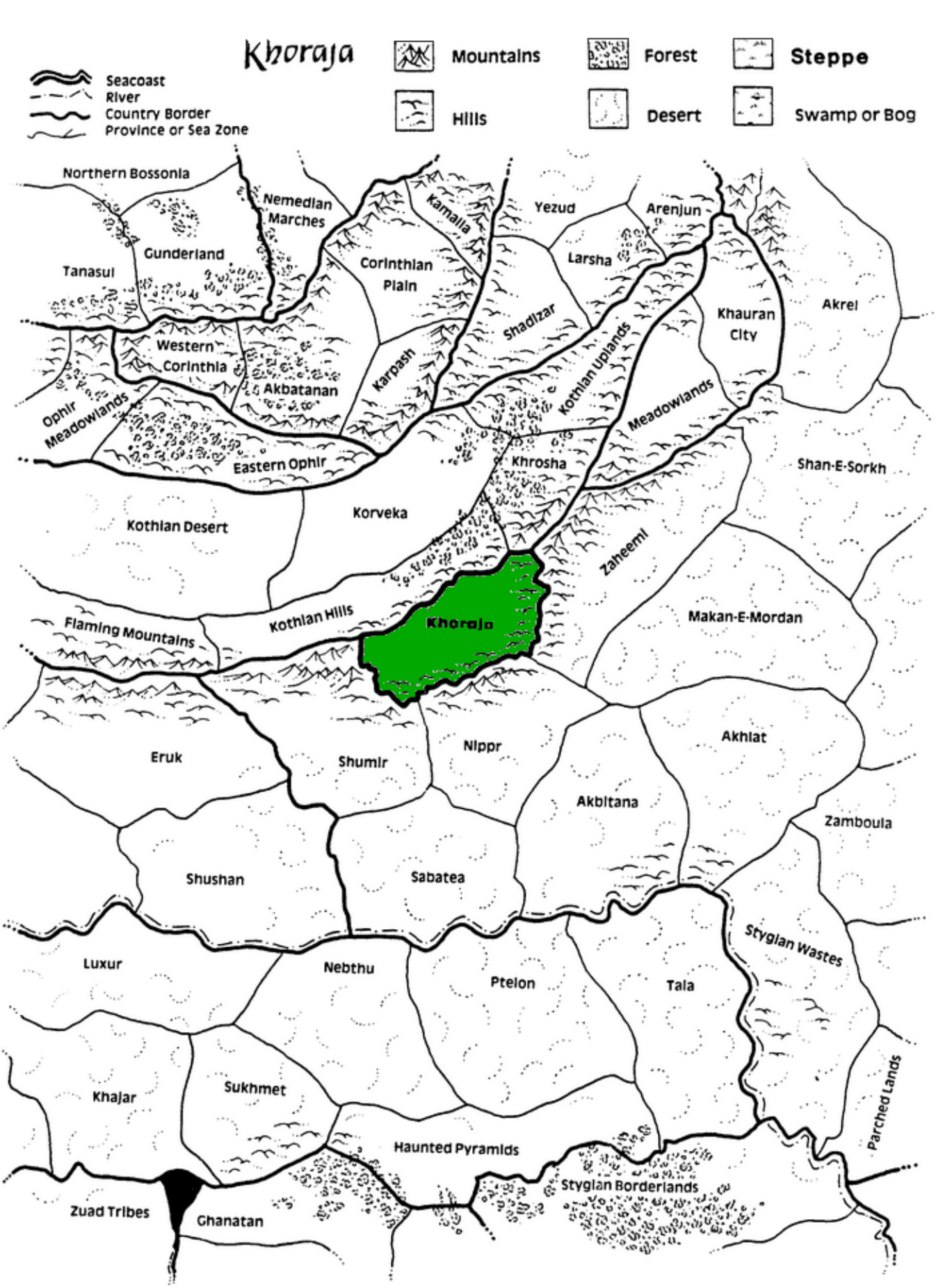
Q. Tom Fyfe, do you have anything else about PBM gaming that you would like to say, in bringing this interview to a close?

It was an amazing time, whilst running games and playing them. The Conventions/Pub-meets were always good. Craic and the people were always friendly, and helpful when out of games. In game,

they were backstabbing S.O.B.'s, but that's the nature of gaming.

What PBM personalities do <u>you</u> want Suspense & Decision magazine to interview, next?? [Write in and tell us!]





The Kingdom of Khoraja

Khoraja

Hyborian War Kingdom Spotlight

Kevin O'Brien

I am going to be discussing a PBM game called Hyborian War, run by a company called Reality Simulations Inc., based out of Tempe, Arizona. It is a game that is molded around Robert E. Howard's most famous creation- Conan. Hyborian War has 36 kingdoms of various sizes, military, and courts. I will be concentrating my thoughts on a small kingdom that is located in Southwest Hyboria. It is one of my favorite kingdoms to play- Khoraja.

Khoraja, one of six small kingdoms in Hyborian war. Khoraja, the small kingdom that packs a punch, and can quickly become a severe nuisance to the bigger kingdoms in the neighborhood. Shem, Turan, Stygia, Argos, Zamora, Ophir, Corinthia, Koth and Argos are all around Khoraja's starting point. Khoraja, the small, overlooked little sister of Koth. Khoraja, with naturally protected flanks to its North with an abundance of Hills. Khoraja, protected from its two starting allies, Koth and Khauran. Khoraja, Khauran, and Koth make up the kingdoms known as the Kothic Triad. They normally work together. Normally...

I will be looking at this small kingdom, and going over possible, beginning scenarios. Most Kingdom Spotlights recommend one course of action, for that is what that particular player had success implementing. I have played Khoraja a handful of times. I have tried different strategies. Hopefully, I can pass on my Khoraja expertise to you, and assist in choosing a opening strategy that best fits your type of game play personality. Do you want to be conservative, semi-daring, or balls-to-the-wall aggressive?

But before we discuss opening strategies, I must first introduce you to this kingdom that lies in the upper Southwest. We will touch upon the Khorajan characters, and their most valuable attributes. We will then discuss the military. We will also look closer at the surrounding area, where lies potential friends or foes. This will encompass Part 1 of the Kingdom Spotlight. Part 2 next month will deal with various opening strategies.! So, take a seat. Grab a beer. And let's discuss, together, this golden nugget of a kingdom!

Paxoi, you can come out of the shadows now. We are amongst friends here....

Court

Khoraja has a great, well-balanced starting court. Though it does not start off with any incredible magnitude characters(at least one attribute with a rating of superior+), it has a little of everything. You have a Reincarnate Wizard(#11). You have a Firewall Wizard(#9). You have a Black Death Wizard(#10). You have a Superior Intrigue Agent(#12). Your Queen, Khosala Thespides, is a Superior Ruler. You have 2 Superior Diplomats(#'s Chancellor and #5). You have 1 Excellent Diplomat(#7). You have 2 Good Diplomats(#1, your Queen, and #3). I find your Queen is adapt at breaking alliances and negotiating treaties, more so then her ability would dictate. Khoraja's court is difficult to rank, in order of prevalence. If

you lose a vital character(most likely because of enemy assassinations), I have noticed it takes awhile before you can get a competent replacement. So, here is my prioritized list for Khoraja.

1. RAJA-11(Insk Altaku). I have never, in five games playing Khoraja, received another reincarnate wizard.

2. RAJA-12(Paxoi Shupras). After initiial turn, he does 1 of 2 things.: protect or counterspy. He is your best defense, and is your last line of defense in protecting your valuable court. You can use him to kill, but make sure #11 is still around.

3. RAJA-1(Lady Khosala Thespides). You are a treasury kingdom. No one can adequately replace her. Not initially, anyway.

4. RAJA-9(Liktok Khanyria). When you are going up against fellow player kingdoms and have set piece battles, you want this Firewall Wizard around.

5 and 6(tie). RAJA-CHA((Wuhan Altaku) and RAJA-5(Altai Almivas). A lot of people believe Chancellors and Adjutant General are dispensable. I am not one of them. The starting Chanchellor and Adjutant General stats are as good as you will get with Khoraja. The Chancellor and RAJA-5 are your Superior Diplomats, and will keep the hounds at bay.

7. RAJA-10(Banaric Fargora). Your Black Death Wizard. Lower ranked on this list, as per norm. Tough call, but I have to also add into the equation that I have had as many as three Black Death wizards while playing Khoraja.

8. RAJA-3(Anshan Almivas). He has Superior Military Command, and is your best General. You put him in the battles you elect to be your most critical for success. He also has good attributes in Personal Combat, Diplomacy, Heroism, and Intrigue. A very well-rounded character, and your only General besides the Adjutant-General. Which brings us to..

9. Adjutant General(Banaric Thespides). He has only Excellent Military Command and Adequate Heroism. But he is your only other viable Military Commander, and someone has to lead your other Imperial Army! You should get better Generals during the Peace Years. He does have one additional use, and that is his Superior Personal Combat. He can protect. He is old, and won't be around for too long. However, if you send him adventuring, he usually comes back smiling. Banaric Thespides is one grizzly dude! He has killed for me on occasion, despite only Adequate Heroism and Poor Intrigue.

10. RAJA-7. He owns a Prophecy Spell. Very useful during the Peace Years, to try and keep tabs on your neighbors.

11-14. RAJA-2(Dern Thespides), RAJA-6(Ata Alkhaku), and RAJA-8(Thebe Alkhaku). They are good for protecting and world spy. Not much more.

Here is my Command Sheet for Khoraja, Turn 0. This will stay the same, regardless of which provinces you decide to go for first.

RAJA-CHA CAST LONG LIFE ON RAJA-CHA. You have a young court. There are no ancient characters. You have three old characters. The Chancellor, with his Superior Diplomacy, is a much needed asset.

RAJA-ADJ SPY SHEM KINGDOM MILITARY or WORLD SPY. He has Poor Intrigue, but if he gets captured while spying it will only cost you a POOR Ransom to get him back. Chancellors and Adjutant Generals have a

pre-set amount of POOR Ransom established whenever captured.

1 ACTIVELY RULE. You must use Khosala to Actively Rule, ESPECIALLY during the first turn, when it is a Peace Years. Regardless of what Kingdom you are playing, you want your Monarch to Actively Rule each and every Peace Years Turn.

2 WORLD SPY. Dern is a good protector, but assassination attempts are not allowed first turn of the game. This is your only viable option for him. Though he might decide to go Adventuring on his own...

3 BREAK ALLIANCE ESHE SHEM

4 BREAK ALLIANCE ESHE SHEM (Another guy that likes to go Adventuring)

5 BREAK ALLIANCE SHEM ESHE

I will discuss the importance of breaking this Alliance in next Month's article.

6 NEGOTIATE PEACE SHEM. SHEM is in no position to immediately invade Khoraja. Peacing and Avoiding the Influence of SHEM is your main objective the following Turn.

7 PROPHECY WORLD or AVOID INFLUENCE SHEM. I like the Prophecy World spell. You can never have enough intelligence in Hyboria. Knowledge is power.

8 NEGOTIATE PEACE SHEM or STYGIA

9 CAST LONG LIFE RAJA-5

10 PROPHECY WORLD

11 BLESS PROVINCE 94, CURSE PROVINCE 136(Shem's Capital), or FAR SIGHT Provinces 203 or 205. You would like to know if SHEM has any Imperial Armies parked in either of these provinces. But if you are successful in Breaking the ESHE-SHEM alliance, you automatically have your answer. SHEM can't move an Imperial Army into ESHE if there is no alliance. That holds true with any two kingdoms.

12 COUNTERSPY KINGDOM

Military

Khoraja has the best military, by far, of any of the other five small kingdoms. Eight possible troops types can be raised, as well as four mercenary types(if you maintain your treasury). The military is weighed towards cavalry. And that will help you in your desert battles. Cavalry have a troop advantage in the desert. And since the desert is the primary terrain in the area, this will aid you tremendously in a majority of the immediate provinces that are to your South. Khoraja, as a small kingdom, can tangle with any other kingdom under the right circumstances, one Imperial Army versus one Imperial Army. Give Khoraja Desert Terrain, an Imperial Army loaded with heavy cavalry, and some battle magic(especially that Fire Wall!), and I like their chances. The Fire Wall spell also dishes out extra damage in Desert and Open Terrain. If you can't fill your Imperial Army with all Heavy Cavalry initially, don't fret. The remaining balance of the thirty troops can be utilized with Medium Cavalry.

Khoraja Troop Breakdown

Type 1 Mailed Nobles. Heavy Cavalry. Can have up to 10% of total troops Type 1.

Type 2 Mailed Lancers. Heavy Cavalry. Can have up to 15% of total troops Type 2.

***Note- Most kingdoms have a 20% cap on recruitment of Heavy Cavalry. Khoraja has 25%.

Type 3 Young Knights. Medium Cavalry. Minimum 20%, Maximum 40%.

Type 4 Zaheemi Warriors. Medium Cavalry Archer. Hill Terrain Bonus. Minimum 20%, Maximum 35%.

Type 5 Zaheemi Tribesmen. Light Cavalry Archer. Hill Terrain Bonus. Maximum 5%.

Type 6 Free Nobles. Light Infantry. Minimum 15%, Maximum 30%. You want to keep the Minimum.

Type 7 Village Archers. Light Infantry Archer. Minimum 5%, Maximum 15%.

Type 8 Mercenary Desert Nomads. Light Cavalry. Desert Bonus. Only allowed 1.

Mercenary Options

Maximum 20%

M1 Heavy Infantry

M2 Heavy Cavalry

M3 Heavy Infantry

M4 Heavy Cavalry

Khoraja starts off with 22 troops. 10 in Imperial Army 1. The Army consists of 1 Mercenary Heavy Cavalry, 1 Mailed Lancer(another Heavy Cavalry), 1 Troop of Type 8(Mercenary Desert Nomads, which fights in Desert Terrain with increased ability). The rest of the Army is basically junk. 2 Light Infantry Archers(Troop Type 7), 2 Light Infantry(Troop Type 6), 2 Medium Cavalry Archers(Troop Type 4, which fights better in Hill Terrain), and 1 Light Cavalry Archer(Troop Type 5, which fights better in Hill Terrain). You won't raise enough troops or buy enough Mercenaries to fill the Imperial Army, so you might as well keep all the troops in there. Some troops are better then none. Though that could be debated!

Normally I would put the LI(Light Infantry) and LIA(Light Infantry Archer) in any owned provinces, solely for Defensive purposes. The LCA(Light Cavalry Archer) and MCA(Medium Cavalry Archer) is normally suitable for Defensive Troops to the North of your Capital, where Hill Terrain is prevalent and where they have an advantage in battle. But, beggars can't be choosers. Until you get rolling, any troops count.

Imperial Army 2(IA-2) looks a lot better. But first, don't forget to change the Army's status from Defensive to Active. IA-2 also has 10 troops. 6 are the Young Knights(Troop Type 3, and Medium Cavalry). You then have 2 troops of MCA and 2 troops of LI.

In your Capital, you have 1 Troop Type 1(Heavy Cavalry) and 1 Troop 4(Medium Cavalry Archer). You are able to use Troops from your Provincial Army, as long as you are adjacent to any province you are invading. Since you are free from any hostile invasions initially, I recommend this course of action.

For your first troop raises, you are a bit lucky. You already have more then is required for Troop Type 6(LI) and Troop Type 7(LIA). Always attempt to raise more then is possible. Why wouldn't you? Here is what I do:

Raise 10 of Troop Type 1(HC)

Raise 10 of Troop Type 2(HC)

Then Mercenaries. Until you go head to head with SHEM(if you do), you will be buying Heavy Cavalry Mercenary Troops. I like M2 over M4. Missile command is less. M2 has ADEQUATE. M4 has GOOD. But M2 has better Melee numbers. M2 is EXCELLENT. M4 is GOOD.

So:

Raise 10 troops of M2.

You won't get these troops. You are likely to get 6-8 HC from raising, and another 5-6 Mercenary HC.

So, you will have approximately 34 Troops riding into battle from the onslaught. So, about 17 troops per Imperial Army. Not exactly scary. But it gets better down the road. Trust me! But to raise your confidence a little, here are the ESHE(eastern Shem) troops and locations. Saves you a little effort!

IA-1 in Nippr with 8 troops

IA-2 in Sabatea with 10 troops

PA-203(Shumir) has 12 troops

PA-204(Sabatea) has 7 troops

PA-205(Nippr) has 6 troops

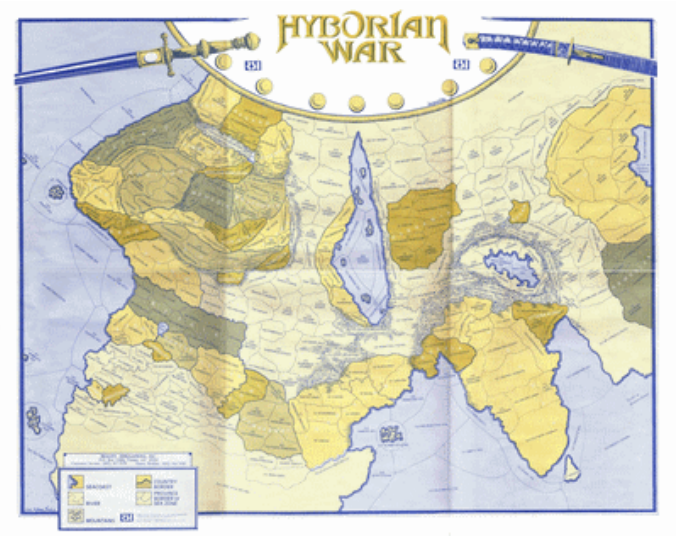
PA-206(Akbitana) has 7 troops

Eastern Shem has approximately 50 troops to your 34. With one big difference. They have similar troop types. However, they are divided. Your forces are consolidated. You will also have the numerical advantage when you ride into Shumir and Nippr. As it stands right now, if you were to invade, you would have a 17-14 Troop advantage in Nippr and a 17-12 troop advantage in Shumir. Of course, this is assuming success on breaking that ESHE-SHEM alliance! Strategy will be discussed in Part 2 of this Kingdom Spotlight next month. The last thing we need to discuss this issue is..

Geography

You are nestled in between 2 allies from the start. KOTH protects your Northern flank from a multitude of potential enemies.

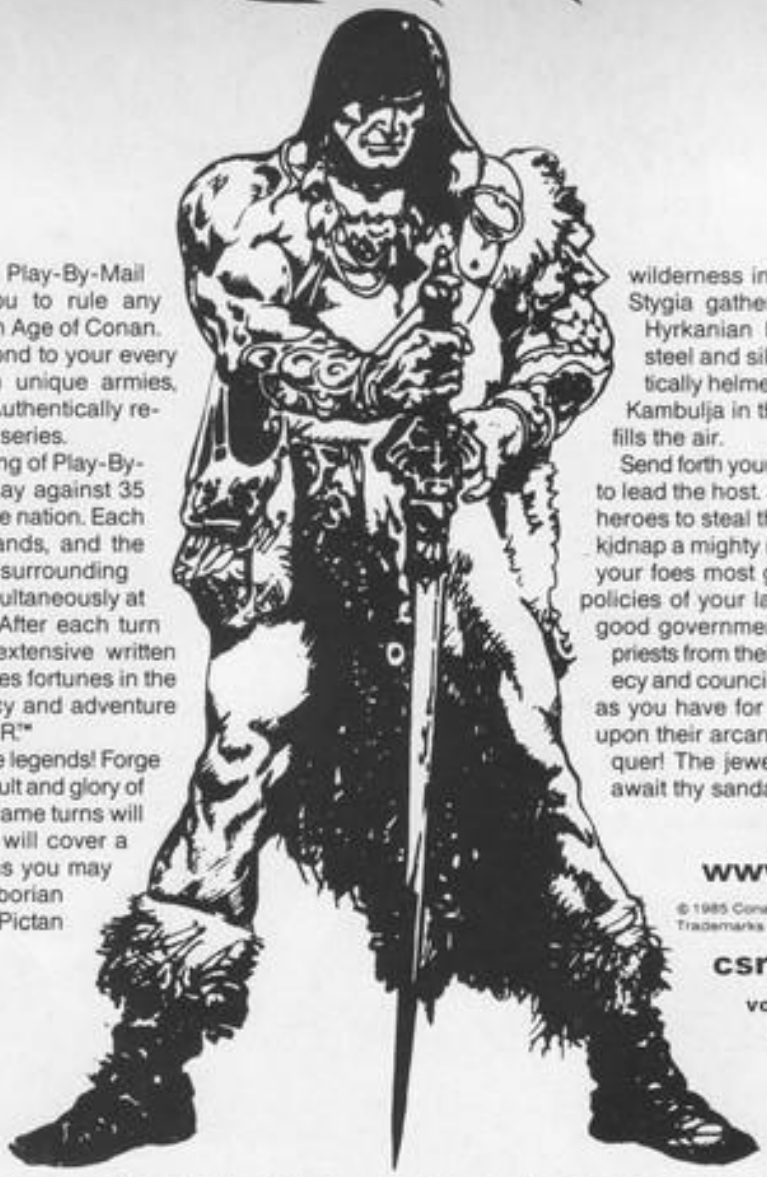
KHAURAN protects your Eastern flank from the ever-aggressive Turanians and the ever-sneaky Zamorans. To your South is a open highway for you, of non-player kingdoms ripe for the plucking. If the Kothic Triad is strong, success is that much easier. You have to hope KOTH can, at the very least, keep its homeland provinces secure. Your potential enemies the first warseasons (barring any attacks thru KOTH) will be SHEM, STYGIA, and TURAN. SHEM and KHORAJA should be automatic rivals. If Khoraja takes even just 1 Eastern Shemish province, Shem's own victory rankings plummet. You would think STYGIA and KHORAJA would be good allies. Stygia does need Eruk, to go Imperial. However, I have found, more often than not, that STYGIA goes for your Imperial Goals. This, of course, is not good. And then, there is TURAN. The further East you go, the closer you get to that province muncher. Other potential enemies include CORINTHIA, ZAMORA, OPHIR, and ARGOS to your North. In the South, KESHAN, PUNT, and ZEMBABWEI. *A plethora of dangerous possibilities, which will be discussed next issue!*



PLAY

HYBORIAN WAR™

IMPERIAL CONQUEST IN THE AGE OF CONAN®



HYBORIAN WAR™ is a Play-By-Mail game which allows you to rule any Kingdom in the Hyborian Age of Conan. Your Kingdom will respond to your every command with its own unique armies, leaders and culture — Authentically re-created from the Conan series.

In the imaginative setting of Play-By-Mail gaming you can play against 35 players from all across the nation. Each game turn your commands, and the commands of the rulers surrounding you, will be resolved simultaneously at our processing center. After each turn you will receive back extensive written accounts of your countries fortunes in the battle, intrigue, diplomacy and adventure which is HYBORIAN WAR™

Now you can create the legends! Forge by your decisions the tumult and glory of the Hyborian Age. Your game turns will be simple to fill out but will cover a fantastic range of actions you may take ... Across the Hyborian world, from the howling Pictan wilderness in the west, to slumbering Stygia gathering her wizards, to the Hyrkanian kingdoms with riders in steel and silk and gold, to the fantastically helmed armies of the Khitai and Kambulja in the east, the cry of empire fills the air.

Send forth your tested lords and generals to lead the host. Send forth your spys and heroes to steal the treasures of the world, kidnap a mighty noble, or even assasinate your foes most gifted wizard! Decree the policies of your land, giving your subjects good government or bad. Call forth your priests from their temples to speak prophecy and council. Command such wizards as you have for the tide of war may turn upon their arcane magics. Rule and conquer! The jeweled thrones of the earth await thy sandaled tread.

www.reality.com

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

csr@reality.com

voice: 480-967-7979
fax: 480-894-2028

WRITE US FOR OUR FREE, NO OBLIGATION, SET-UP AND RULES
REALITY SIMULATIONS, INC., P.O. BOX 22400, TEMPE, AZ, 85285-2400

Turn fees are $5, $7, or $9/turn depending on the size of country you chose to play. Join the tens of thousands nationally who are enjoying the vivid interactive games only made possible in the last few years by recent advances in computer technology. PBM — the fastest growing gaming industry in the nation.

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

Empires at War 1805

www.eaw1805.com

- 120 Troop Types
- 17 Empires
- 4 Theaters of War
- 1 Napoleonic Wargame

- Turn-based system that allows you to play when you want.
- No installation needed, the game loads on your browser.
- Player Profiles & Hall of Fame: Your victories are recorded.

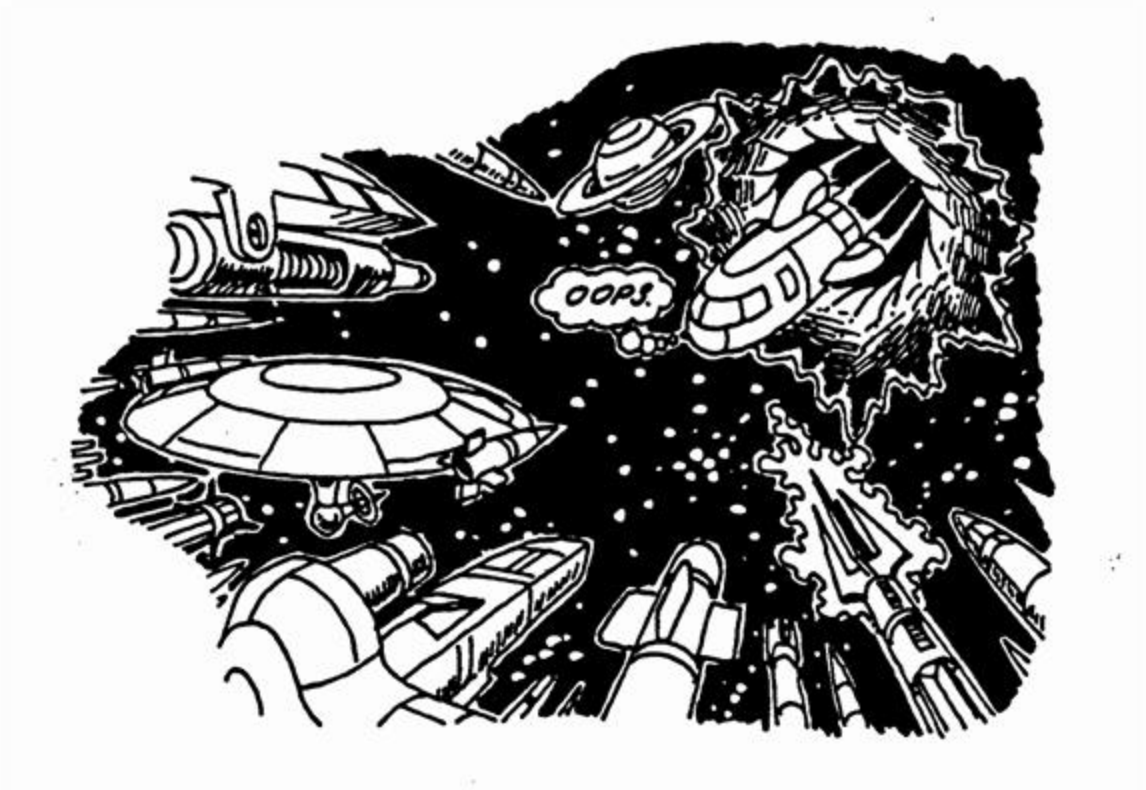
- Build an Empire across Europe and the Colonies.
- Forge alliances, wage wars, compete against human opponents.
- Command your troops on both strategic and tactical level.

Join the campaign now!

www.eaw1805.com

Bringing tabletop wargaming experience online.

GALAC-TAC



GALAC-TAC is a classic game of galactic conquest, bringing fun and challenge to the PBM world since 1982. Claim your place in the galaxy, and develop and defend it with ships of your own design. After more than three decades in play, now skip the postage stamp and enter your game orders online! Download optional "game assistant" software to help you manage the details. Play solo against the computer for fun or "practice", or be part of a live game with 10-15 human players. New customization options are available for number of players, turnaround time, and more. Set up a private game, or be part of a game open to all. Who occupies the second star on the right? Send in your scout and see, or charge in with weapons blasting!

Make new friends! Make new enemies!

For more information, or to sign up as a player (for only $5/month!), visit

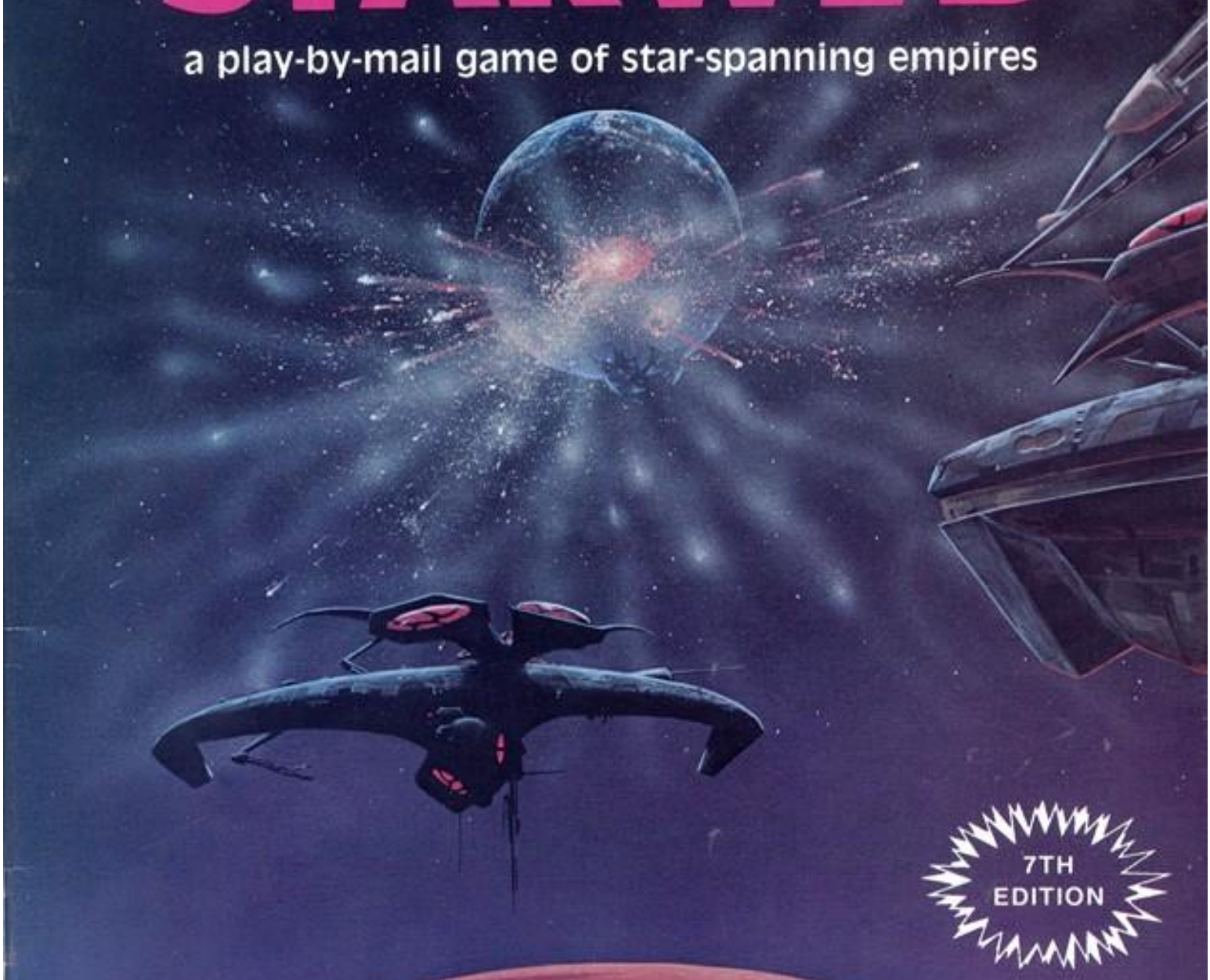
www.talisman-games.com

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

$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

It's a Megadungeon Meltdown!

The original role playing game challenge once again has been cast.

If you are familiar with the Old School Revival of pre-3rd edition fantasy games, then you might also know that some very capable gamers have self-published their own take on the megadungeon... a large, organic underground campaign world that adjusts to incursions by those foolish enough to dare.

I want you to be one of those foo... er, brave souls and help me test out one of these megadungeons that I have been collecting. There are three dungeons and I need three players (one player per game, that is). You get two PCs (both of whom you have full control over) and two NPCs (as companions) for your starting party. Want to play with a friend? Each of you can take one of the PCs to play in the same game.

But the kicker? This isn't play on the Internet. It's an old fashioned postal game. That's right... paper, envelopes, stamps. The game is slow but never boring. Think of it as a secondary pastime that comes around every two or three weeks.

So, I have three slots for this game. First to respond gets first choice of which megadungeon they want to play. If I get more than three responses, I have a contingency possible for up to an additional two players.

Send me an email for more information: mrnielsen@frontier.com

Balancing the Blade

Adjudicating Table Top RPGs through the Mail

Mark Nielsen

There are people who say that it's impossible or at least very unwieldy to try to play traditional table top role playing games through the mail. For some players, this may be correct. I certainly have had many games dry up over the 20 or so years that I have been at this. However, these years of experience have led me to derive a theory of postal RPG play that may have some wider application. I've had games go on for two or three years at a stretch (and sometimes longer). Game longevity is dependent on three factors which together must be balanced not unlike a dirk on the forefinger of a wily blackguard.

The length of the blade is “creation”. There is a great temptation for the Game Master to write a story and allow the player to choose only at appointed times. This form of interactive fiction is only superficially based in the game you are ostensibly playing. It arises from both internal and external pressures. Internally, as a GM, you want to write something interesting for your player. If a player searches a pilfered scroll case for a poisoned needle before opening the case, you as a GM want to communicate more than “You find no traps”. Externally, what you write will be the extent of your communication with the player for what may be several days or even a couple of weeks. It's not face to face gaming where minor matters are swiftly resolved. There has to be value in every piece of correspondence.

Being a creative person as a GM, you might give in to your urges and develop a railroading narrative. I'm not going to say that this is a bad way to go for everyone. Interactive fiction can be a lot of fun. But in my experience, it does not support long term game play. If you want to be true to the table top game, it is best to allow the player as much as possible of the kind of freedom that table top games allow.

If you want to stay grounded in the game, it is necessary to play by the rules. Play combat with dice. Always keep the random element. Don't impose fiat by dictating what seems like it would be more dramatic in the short term. The more you stay honest as the Game Master, the more enjoyable it is when the random results end up showing the unexpected. It is all in the interpretation of the dice. You can make what might seem to be a failure (or even a non-event) into something intriguing. Instead of “You find no traps”, try “The scroll case is made of some strange reptilian leather. To touch it lends you a sense of unease. But if there is a trap, you will have to open the case to discover it.”

Also, make sure that you prepare. Don't wing the whole deal... even though you are writing it rather than speaking it face to face. Use a prepared setting or adventure... either your own work or a commercial product. You don't have to stick slavishly to the adventure but having the base already there means that you can later improvise without gaming yourself into a corner. Admittedly, the creative process is different for every GM so you may be talented enough to ignore this...

but it has worked for me.

The tip of the blade is "novelty". It is the most dangerous point of the game. You can easily hurt yourself with it. But if it is wielded correctly, it will lead to the heart. As I have previously mentioned, there is always a pressure to be interesting. The Game Master is tempted to turn the game in a surprising way. But surprises can begin to pall. The GM wants to end strong, so that the player will be enthralled and encouraged to write back. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to force the action.

In-game action should be real. Never falsify. Don't ever have outcomes predetermined. Because, if you do, the player will begin to sense it. That has the potential to kill the player's interest. Then the game is essentially over... at least the sense of risk is over... and that greatly reduces player's buy in. He or she might keep writing to you out of decency or obligation. But the game has expired.

However, novelty is the essence of a table top role playing game played by mail. How can you be true to the game and your player and still provide novelty when the game seems slow or mundane? The first rule is that being mundane is not an instantaneous death of your game. Allow yourself to be less than exciting when it eventually leads to legitimate excitement. You don't have to have a tavern fight every time your player wants to gather rumors.

The second rule is, as a GM, to have a legitimate in-game voice. Sometimes, that means a NPC companion of some kind for the player. When things get dull, add interest with dialogue or conjecture (not always helpful) from the warrior who has attached herself to the player's hero.

Another form of in-game voice is a fictional book or tome that you can reference periodically (think "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"). In some of my city setting games, I occasionally include a list of rumors and happenings that the player's character would learn of simply by passing through the streets.

There are many ways to be interesting. Remember that a role playing game is about the player's choices. Provide good choices. Don't step on their agency... the player's ability to act consequentially is the heart's blood of any game's novelty.

Finally, the hilt of our metaphorical blade is "consideration". A naked blade is useless without a place to lever it, so the GM needs to think about the game in a distinct out of game way.

When you play table top role playing games through the mail, you give up a lot as compared to face to face play. You can't see the suspense on your player's faces, as their characters climb to a roc's nest to steal an egg for that cagey old wizard who has their souls in a jar. Neither can you complete the transaction in one real time session of a few hours.

What gaming by mail gives you is time to consider. Set aside your player's letter. Go for a walk or bike ride. Think, then write, then think again. Do not let your initial draft always be your final one. This is where the richness of postal games lies. So don't cast aside the opportunity to allow the possibilities to run through your hands... some may be dross... others might be silver... but try to seek the gold.

Can there be too much consideration? Yes, if it causes you to never write the game. Or if you become too layered (or meta) in your

letter for your player to enjoy. Otherwise, as a rule, it's better to consider before the fact than after.

All this said, in a game that lasts many years, you will make mistakes. At times, you will probably not take full advantage of your powers of consideration. You might even make a choice for the player rather than let him decide. As long as you don't make them your habit, with a good player, you can recover from such lapses.

All of the suggestions I mention here are based as much on the bad decisions that I have made in previous games as the good ones. I know each GM must find their own balance when it comes to playing table top RPGs by mail. So game on and may your own blade strike true.

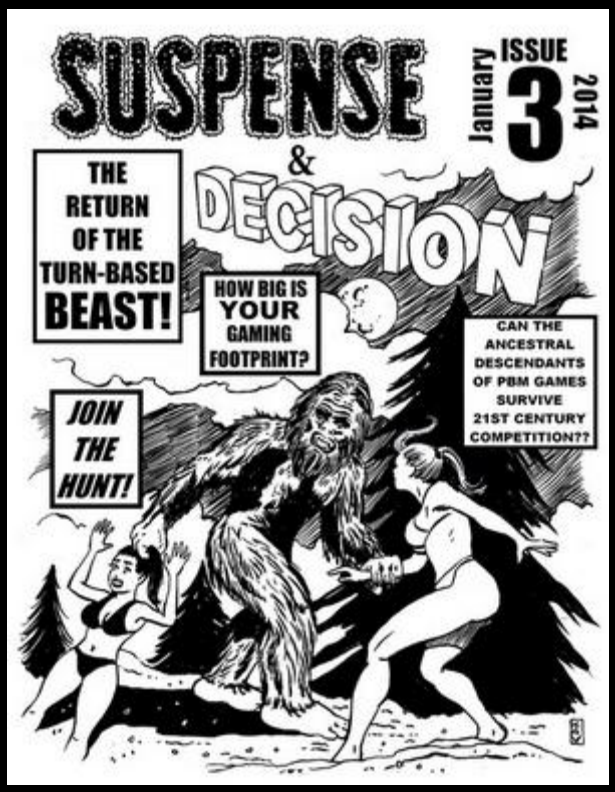
The Diplomatic Pouch

Diplomacy: The art of keeping cool.
--William Jennings Bryan

Since 1995 The Diplomatic Pouch has been the flagship publication of the Diplomacy hobby. Trusted for news, information and strategy and tactics articles, read the Pouch today. New issues five times a year.

http://diplom.org/DipPouch/Zine/

Earlier issues available!



Click on the images, above, to download and read!

HEROIC FANTASY

FANTASY ROLE PLAYING BY MAIL

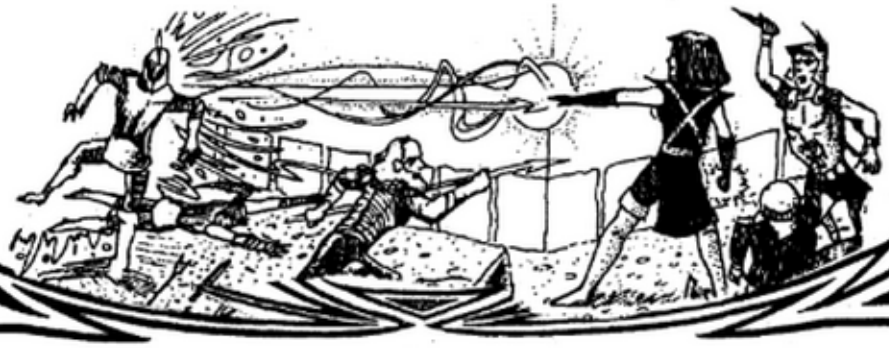
YOU direct a party of up to fifteen fighters and magic users (humans, elves, dwarves, fairies, gremlins, even trolls) through a dungeon maze killing monsters, gathering treasure, and hunting for magical prizes.

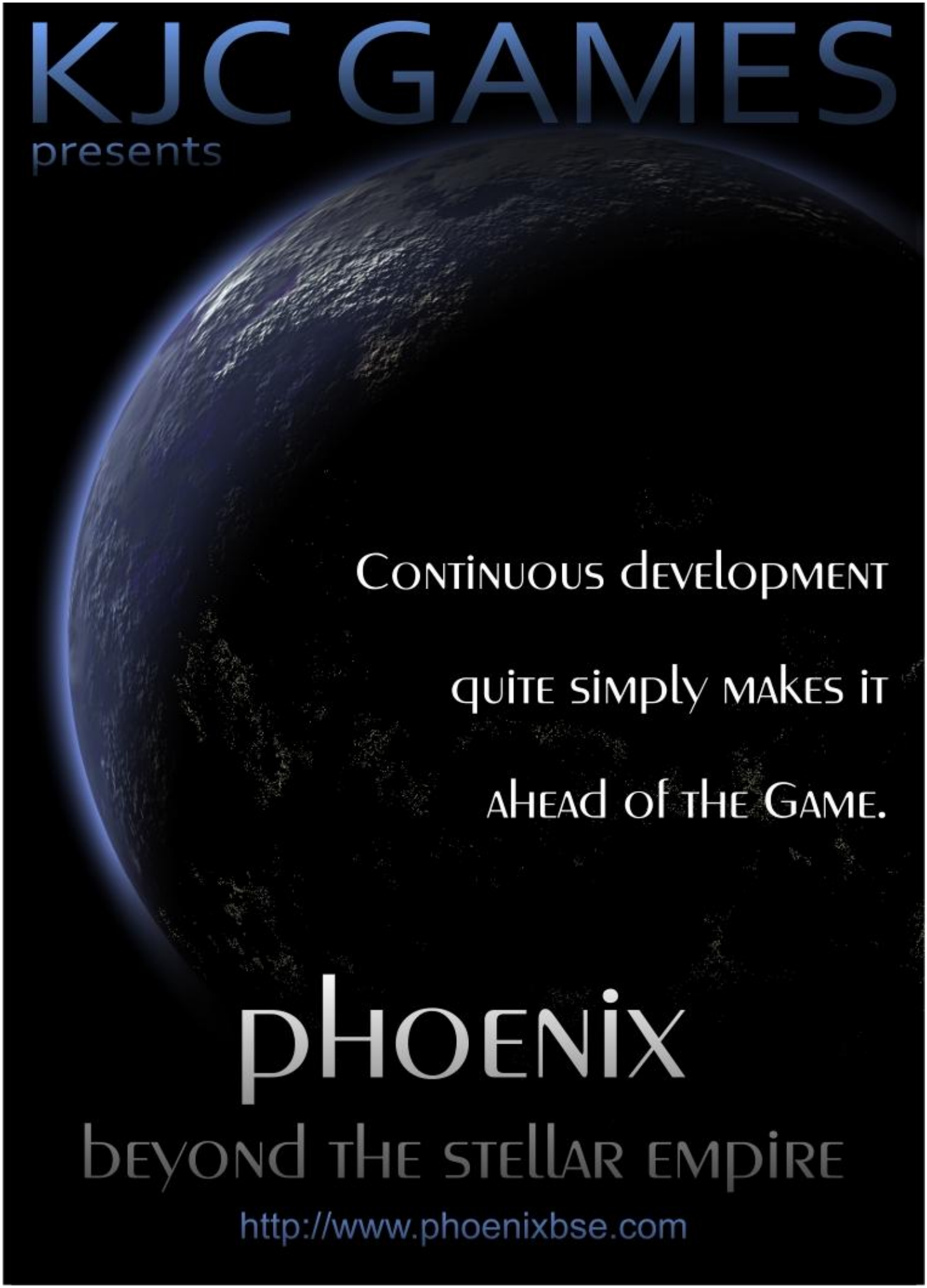
There are currently four levels (ultimately, there will be five) and over 400 players already exploring the depths. This game has been extensively play-tested, and has been running since 1982. The per-turn fee is only $3.00, and for this one fee, you get to move all 15 of your characters. They can stay together, or split up into several parties moving in different directions, all for one single turn fee! No "extra action fees,' ever! Our game is completely computer-run, so no human referee interferes with your enjoyment - *and there are seldom any errors.* (If we DO make an error on your turn, we will refund **DOUBLE** your turn fee!)

Flying Buffalo, Inc. has been running play by mail games for 44 years. We are the very first professional PBM company. We are members of the Game Manufacturers Association (**GAMA**). In addition to Heroic Fantasy, we have science fiction games, war games, and medieval games. Write today for a free copy of our PBM catalog, or send $2 for the rules to HEROIC FANTASY. (Please do not ask to be in any game, until you have seen a copy of the rules).

Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O. Box 8467, Scottsdale, AZ 85282

WWW.FLYINGBUFFALO.COM




KJC GAMES
presents
Continuous development
quite simply makes it
ahead of the Game.
phoenix
beyond the stellar empire
http://www.phoenixbse.com

The Development Cycle

Pub meets and improvements for Phoenix:BSE

Amber

One thing that makes Phoenix:BSE stand out is the constant development of the game, but how do we go about choosing what areas of the game to concentrate on and how is the development implemented?

Well firstly we have in our heads an idea of where the game is heading, we are gamers and the main principle we have always stuck with is that Phoenix has to be a game that we would want to play ourselves, and we would never incorporate an aspect of game play that we did not like or agree with, When we have decided on a rough area of the game that we would like to develop then we go through it and rough out a development plan with what we anticipate will be about a year's worth of programming. We usually have a long weekend of work where either we go up to Blackpool to see Mica or he comes down to Stoke and the weekend is spend developing the plans and getting input from both sides.

On the Nexus there is also a development suggestion forum where players can put forward their ideas to make improvements. Usually these are issues that players have come across in the game and they have had an idea how a process could be improved or clarified, sometimes these are straight forward changes that just takes a quick tweak, or it could be something more substantial to think about for the next years development plan.

When the plans have been fleshed out it is the time to discuss them with the players. Every year around November we take over the Sutton Park Hotel in Blackpool to have a pubmeet. For those who don't know Blackpool they have Illuminations from the end of August through to the beginning of November so the best time to book the hotel is just after the illuminations have finished and before the turkey and tinsel weekends start. Before the meet the development plans are put up on the Nexus for all the players to read, here is an extract from last year's development plan, the full details are on the Nexus and can be pretty hefty reading.

Pub Meet 2013

The main area of discussion, this time, is infrastructure. We have looked at this, a lot, in the past. The difference, this time, is that we are starting to look at exactly what the numbers will be. The pub meets just lay out where we are generally going, and what ideas we are having. We do not have a schedule of when everything will be completed, but the general sense is that, the older items in the list are more likely it is to be finished first.

Infrastructure

Development Plan

Governments

Development Plan

It's worth noting that we share what we are planning to do so that people can see where we are going and can contribute. It's not intended to be used as a list that will be finished for next year, other things crop up that inevitably slow development down. The reason we discuss what we are doing years in advance is to make the end result better and less of a surprise (nasty or otherwise). I think we have now completed everything we announced in 2010, so it's only a 3 year delay :)

[1] Contagions

We will be adding several categories of virus (an all encompassing term) to the game and controlling their transmission/removal. This will include rumours and will be supported through notifications so that you know its happening (once any of your positions are aware of the situation).

[2] Recruitment Banners

We are going to add the option to create banners so that you can 'advertise' the game for us but with the advantage that you get in-game stellars for each new player and bonuses for how long they stay.

[3] Missions

Missions are in a very usable state within the game but adding and checking them is very time-consuming. We need an internal debugging process for the missions allowing their results to be checked without requiring a test platform. This will allow Mica to add more missions without having to have to write them 'blind' and having them debugged later by Darak.

[4] Authorisations

Authorisations need better implementation. They are currently stored as individual pieces of data on the positions that authorises the actions. This leads to none ideal situations with positions disappearing etc. The authorisations will be converted to a new system that can handle more features (pickups from item groups etc.) and will be global (i.e. databased) across the game. The political authorisations can be incorporated into this new system to allow a clear picture of who is able to pick-up from a given position.

[5] Speed Improvements

We need to sort out a couple of issues relating to celestial bodies to make the game run faster through caching. There are about 200-300 instances of a load that are currently not cached. Since the celestial body is loaded for every ship that is scanned as a ship enters orbit it can be quite time consuming, especially for busy orbits in Yank.

[6]Battle Resolution (Ghost Battles)

We are aware of some of the problems surrounding people being confused about battles that do not seem to happen. This is due to the events not being fully disclosed inside the game. We will make changes so that that it's much clearer what should be happening. So that battles that seem to have occurred are cleared down properly and reported on. Need notifications done before we could move onto this.

[7] More Ship upgrades

The upgrade ship order will be made more flexible allowing ships to be upgraded for various tasks as part of their hulls, as well as their internals. This will allow for improvements to combat, exploration, cargo

etc., based on new upgrade research. This will be partially player lead, so if there are some things that you would like to see

The underlying mechanic is already in we need to formalise the process of adding upgrades to ships.

[8] Officers /Agents /Characters

The aim will be to improve individual ships, so that they are more important for players with larger numbers of ships. Officer skills incorporating fleet bonuses will be introduced. We would like to convert agents to officer like mechanics as well. I want to see these in asap but everything always seem to get in front of them. I would like to see operatives sent in on missions that take time to achieve with risk weighed inversely against time.

[9] Infrastructure

The dreaded infrastructure is back but this times it is not fluffy. We have tied down a lot of what we want to do and it's a straight forward world/government building guide this time. We could have changed its name but that did not seem right.

[10] Location Based Custom Functions

We are going to include a way to run a function that triggers when things pass through a specific point in the game. This will allow Mica to add custom orders that activate automatically. These can be used to attack your prospecting crew with natives or give you plagues when you land on certain planets.

[11] Events

Triggers in mining for instance that create missions online for you to react to. Essentially a different way to create missions. These are now possible because notifications will make them much more obvious.

Those who cannot make it to the meet have a chance to read the plan through and pass any question onto others in their affiliation who are going, there is usually a pretty fair representation of all affiliations at the pub meet. The Friday night is generally a time to have a chat and a few beers, on the Saturday Darak and Mica do a presentation on how that past year has gone, and they work through the development plan for the next year. Players have the opportunity to ask questions, raise objections or make suggestions. After the presentation players have the change to have individual and affiliation meeting with us to raise issues for their affiliations and develop their ideas for plans they have for their affiliations. When everyone is happy we can take the list away and start programming it.

In addition to the development list time is also allowed for the general maintenance of the code and bug fixing. One of the most frustrating things for us is that sometimes it seems that it takes a long time to get to work on the development list as programming time is eaten away by having to do unseen work on the code that players do not always appreciate.

One of the most significant changes to the game last year was a restructuring to how the game run works. Previously the run started early in the morning, ran through all the turns and then Mica processed the special actions until the end of the day, at which point he would have to defer any special actions that he did not have time to finish before he could then end the days run

and send out the e-mails, which on a typical say would start to arrive to players after five o'clock. Players would then have the evening to review the turns if they wanted to send in a turn for the following day. The structure of the run was changed so the the game run was started in the morning, turns were run as usual but the special actions were separated out from the rest of the turns and handled differently. All of the normal action turns are then processed and e-mails sent out, usually by around eleven o'clock in the morning. Mica can then spent the rest of his day doing special actions and send them out when they are complete.

This has been one of the most significant change to how the game works but players now take it for granted that they have e-mails so early in the day, they can review their turns in their lunch hour or while commuting home and have more time to plan their turns for the following day. Making such a significant change took a large chunk of programming time and so reduced the development time of in-game issues but the quality of the game experience improved for all players.

There is also a substantial bug list, whenever a player comes across a bug in the game they can either put the details onto the nexus or PM Darak if it is something more confidential. All of these bugs then get transferred to his list. There is a handwritten list of numbered points and as each one is done it gets crossed off. Unfortunately it seems to be a never ending list as bugs are added to the list as quickly as they are fixed. Usually time is set aside that is specifically devoted to bug issues to keep on top of them.

Another thing that eats into the development time is emergency coding. Sometimes things go wrong and all else has to be stopped until the issue is fixed. A good example of this happened this week. KJC had a forced change of internet providers when the company that they had been using for years was bought out by another company. Overnight, their internet dropped down to an eighth of the connection that they had. before - a job that used to take 5 minutes, now took 40 minutes. Calls to the new provider proved to be no help, at all, and they insisted that there was nothing they could do about it, all this happening in the worst possible week coming up to the Easter weekend with two double run days. In the end we compressed the data to make the transfer faster so the overall effect is that the process is now back to where it was before, extra time and effort spent to make the service the same so that players should not notice the difference. On the plus side though when KJC get back a proper internet connect it was will a superfast transfer.

All the changes are kept on the offline development environment and when a chuck of the development has been done they are updated to the live system. All of the applied changes are listed on the nexus for everyone who wants to go through it in detail.

Extracts from Update 7/11/13, the full list can be found on the Nexus and goes on for several pages.

This update contains a number of small bug fixes and requested + 3 main changes

Boarding Improvement: *Added auto boarding, boarding orders, boarding craft and raiding*

Mining Improvements: *Added ability to deep core mine all deposits, mining existing*

deposits via 4 methods and formalized improvement of deposits by burning tech

Notifications: *The start of telling you what's happening to all your positions in one place.*

Slavery Re-balance: *Slaves will now add -ve security to bases and cost a small maintenance fee*

Coming soon, i.ee.: coding done but needs a few tweaks.

Starbase editor : *(like ship editor), needs speeding up on live data*

Notifications: *The start of telling you whats happening to all your positions in one place - needs to be tested on live data before letting people crash their browsers*

Phoenix Changes

[1] Fixed Subvert starbase order.

[2] Fixed WoMD order to use relations.

[3] Fixed relation changing where there is a derived relation.

[4] Fixed bug with battles that win not giving promotions.

[5] Added "Upgrade" to ships to allow other skills to be added to ships.

[6] Made upgrades additive with skills.

[7] Fixed issues when ship with no crew but full efficiency ran off from SB.

….

….

[58] Corrected problem with ground bombers not launching from GPs.

[59] Bases on accounts suspended accounts will:

- After 1 month will lose their system claim,

- After 3 months become flagged as CIV and shutdown these are open to purchase by anyone or returnable to original owner for no cost.

[61] Fixed issue with fixed crew in debris .

[62] Changed new ship names to be the design name used to build it.

[63] Removed set anonymous order and flag.

[64] Added tick box to 'Remove Item Group' that only removes the items not the group.

Phoenix GM/Internal Changes

[1] Added SaveCBody / Write_CBodyCustomData / SetOrderTus / CheckTUsAvailable /Decimal and Time function to GM custom orders

[2] Added claim size/aff to data from Read_Position function

[3] Converted FindRandomPlanet to a position order

[4] Corrected custom order Print to Add format <l4> and dealt with %f

….

….

[18] Fixed 3 letter search in special actions.

[19] Added button to political to make player owned.

[20] Added government type to CBodies + editor

Nexus Changes

[1] Changed sa=lib on home page to go to external page.

[2] Changed back to UTF-8 may cause issues.

[3] Converted TMs to Yes/No for bools + know list on substitutes.

[4] Removes old FoC turn from nexus when ID changes.

….

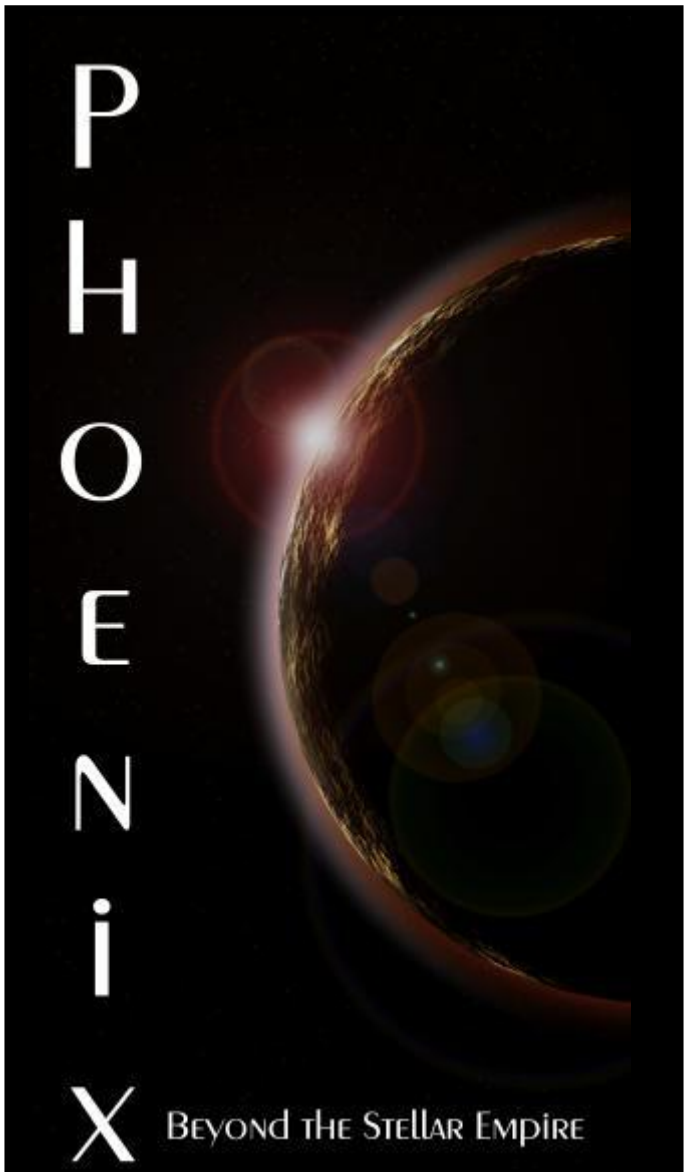
….

[16] Added game_status and turn_data&tid=<number id> to XML services.

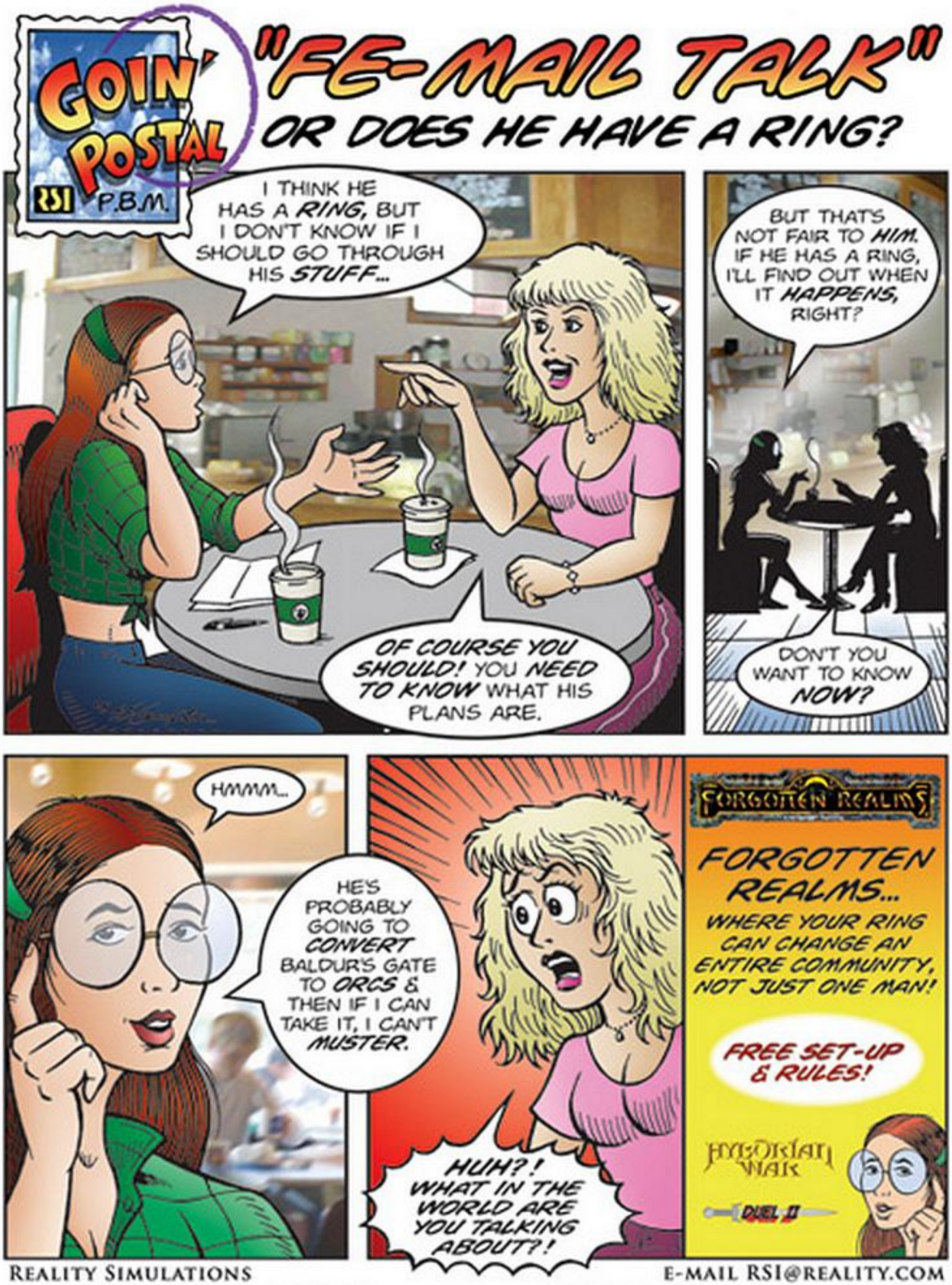
[17] Notifications are added but not active yet – need to see how they work on live data.

Hopefully this has explained a bit about how we go about developing the game, a mix of taking players ideas with our own vision, listening to what the players think about the plans and adapting to the feedback they give to us. Although progress at times may seem to be slow, a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to keep the code modern and adaptable.

All of this process means that, over the past years, there has been continual changes - to hopefully make the game a better experience for all players, and we are dedicated to continue development of Phoenix:BSE to make it even better.



Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire is a turn-based, open-ended space opera. It combines strategy and tactics with resource management in a persistent universe that has been continuously running for over 20 years.



REALITY SIMULATIONS
P.O. BOX 22400 TEMPE, AZ 85285
E-MAIL RSI@REALITY.COM
(480) 967-7979 * FAX (480) 894-2028

Stellar Conflict

exploration • colonization • conquest

www.pbem.dk

Enter "Suspense" in the order comment field and get 10% off on your first game.

COMPANY COMMANDER

Modern Small Unit Combat in the Third World

- ✓ Individual Tanks and Vehicles
- ✓ Artillery & Support Weapons
- ✓ Naval Units
- ✓ Individual Aircraft loaded with Individual Ordnance

- ✓ Headquarters
- ✓ Command Posts
- ✓ Logistics

- ✓ 10-man Infantry Squads
- ✓ 4 Types of Infantry
- ✓ 5-man Support Units
- ✓ Commanders & Officers

- ✓ Email and Postal Play
- ✓ Massive Map Area
- ✓ Free Rules and Map Online

Contact: jason@jason-oates-games.com
Website: www.jason-oates-games.com

The Bigger Picture

A Better Understanding of PlayByMail.Net

Charles Mosteller

PlayByMail.Net touts itself as "a PBM oriented website, whose aim is to promote play by mail gaming and to give PBM gamers a place to gather. From this website has evolved the PBM Wiki, a blog, and Suspense & Decision magazine, a PBM magazine for the 21st Century. The site contains both a discussion forum and a blog. The site seeks to facilitate PBM gaming by serving as a major modern resource for play by mail."

Wow! That's quite a mouthful, huh? But, the search engine optimization beasts that roam the Internet in alien-tech vehicles powered by the very latest in search engine technology must be fed - if we want the site to place well in search results.

Recently, I was paid a compliment, of sorts. I had someone to say to me (via e-mail, of course), "Of all the PBM sites on the internet, playbymail.net is probably the most modern."

Compliments are always nice to receive, aren't they? They make you feel good, because they lead you to believe that you are, at the very least, doing something right.

But, then reality has a way of reasserting itself, and the compliment gets down-sized, internally - as I continue to digest not just what was said, but also, what it means, when considered more fully.

If PlayByMail.Net is the most modern PBM site out there on the Internet (or one of them), which PBM site is the least modern? In other words, which PBM site (or sites) are the most dated, the most antiquated?

This is the point where I inevitably begin stepping on toes.

But, I think that I'll save the toe squishing on this particular subject matter for a future day. I'm pretty sure that I just heard a collective sigh from toes all across the Internet.

Or, maybe that was just my stomach grumbling, reminding me that it's not just search engines that like to be fed.

PlayByMail.Net is less a website than it is a concept. Yeah, I like that. I think that that's a good way of describing it. As previously said, the site seeks to facilitate PBM gaming by serving as a major modern resource for play by mail.

Just what, though, does that mean, exactly?

Obviously, the website end of it is intended to serve as a connecting point for PBM gamers to connect (or reconnect) with both the play by mail hobby and the PBM industry.

Without a doubt, the forum end of things is intended to serve as a mechanism to nurture and to grow dialogue about both the hobby and the industry, as well as the various component parts, thereof.

Unquestionably, the magazine end of things (Suspense & Decision) is intended to act as a herald, and to serve as a PBM vitamin, of sorts. But, it also is intended to serve as a vehicle to bring play by mail and turn-based gaming to the masses, rather than just

waiting for them to come to us. If they won't come to the mountain, then quite understandably, we must bring the mountain (a mountain of gaming entertainment) to them. The alternative is to wait for the mountain to move itself. It won't.

The magazine is a vehicle to inform and to entertain. The gaming aspect of play by mail gaming holds no monopoly upon the concept of entertainment, even within just the confines of PBM, itself. The magazine can be used to entertain, as can the articles and the advertisements and the photographs and the art that collectively comprise the bulk of the magazine's content. Appetizer, anyone?

The PBM Wiki end of things is obviously an attempt to capture - and to preserve - the nostalgia of play by mail gaming, and to serve as a tribute, of sorts, to its history and its lasting legacy to the world of gaming entertainment. Here, you can visit PBM's past, its golden era, and relive (through memories) play by mail games that you have played with in the past, PBM companies that served you up a heaping plate of unique gaming fare, and PBM personalities that you interacted with - and remember. If you weren't alive during PBM's golden era of gaming excitement, the PBM Wiki is intended to serve as a wishing well, of sorts. Think of all of the things that could have been!

But, while these various component parts of the overall concept are all fine and dandy, nonetheless, they remain only a part of what is, in actuality, a bigger picture.

A much bigger picture, in fact!

There's more to it than that, however good or however meager that you consider these particular things to be. PlayByMail.Net is also a service-oriented enterprise. Part of the concept that is PlayByMail.Net is the service end of it, the aspect that is geared towards facilitating PBM companies and game moderators in attracting, engaging, and retaining players.

If and when a former Hyborian War player contacts me, and communicates to me that they are having difficulty getting hold of RSI, I will likely contact Lee Kline over at RSI. I had this to happen recently, in fact. Lee then contacted the individual, and the individual then thanked me. The circle is complete. Mission accomplished. The sheep is returned to the fold. The PBM flock grows.

You've heard of Google+ (Google Plus). Well, what I'm talking about is service+. The service aspect of the PlayByMail.Net concept is probably the least talked about, perhaps even the least known, aspect of the entire overall concept. It's called PlayByMail.Net, because it has to have a name. That particular name just serves a dual purpose. It also doubles as a URL address for a website.

Yet, the URL is merely the concept's secret identity (the name Clark Kent was already taken). Again, I had to call it something, so it ended up getting called PlayByMail.Net.

While on the service end of things, the PlayByMail.Net concept doesn't have the powers of Superman (another great name, and one that was also already taken), rest assured, it is not entirely powerless.

Another example of the service aspect of the component in action would be the Alamaze forum. Rick McDowell is probably taking a siesta, right now, so let's not disturb his snooze, but merely mention in passing that helping Rick McDowell to get a new forum up and running, following technical misfortune that brought the previous forum down, is the

concept of service+ in action.

Rick is good at designing games. As it turns out, game design gurus are not always techno geniuses. Then again, neither am I. But, I was able to facilitate Rick's desire to get a forum up and running for his game.

When a forum user shows up, expressing interest in finding a PBM game to play, it's probably not pure coincidence that Rick Loomis or Mica Goldstone or someone else might receive an e-mail about it. It's a small thing, to be certain, almost a shell, but this kind of thing falls under the ambit of the service+ component of the overall PlayByMail.Net concept.

When you talk about PBM companies, I tend to think about American PBM companies like Flying Buffalo, Reality Simulations, and Rolling Thunder Games, or British PBM companies such as Madhouse, Harleguin Games, Middle-earth PBM, and KJC Games. I haven't played games with all of those PBM companies (even though they may call themselves something else, now, instead of PBM game companies), but those are the ones that tend to come to mind. The proverbial Big Guns of PBM, so to speak.

Yet, there are numerous smaller PBM companies or independent game moderators out there, and the service + end of the PlayByMail.Net concept is there for them, also.

Mica Goldstone of KJC Games grasped, early on, that Phoenix:BSE might just benefit from multiple advertisements for his game in the magazine end of the PlayByMail.Net concept. He chose to take advantage of the opportunity that was presented to his PBM company. Hence, why readers of the magazine have encountered more Phoenix:BSE ads than ads for games run by various PBM competitors.

I suspect that it takes a given amount of time, for the PlayByMail.Net concept to sink more fully into the mind. The concept has many tentacles, reaching out and trying to latch onto something - onto someone. Each tentacle is a tad different from the rest.

The concept's voice is what is used to deliver both criticism and praise. Yet, the voice aspect should not be confused as the only aspect. The concept of PlayByMail.Net is considerably larger than just some bloke yammering on seemingly non-stop about play by mail gaming.

Issue # 6, for instance, features an advertisement for one of the smaller PBM companies, Jason Oates Games, that I assisted Jason in coming up with. He submitted an ad, and I tried to come up with a variant of it - hopefully, an improvement of what was initially submitted. He didn't ask me to do it. Rather, I initiated the variant effort. Whether it will attract any new players to his games or not, only time will bear that out. But, the immediate object is to try and effectuate a more visible presence for his company and its games via the crafting of new advertisements for Jason Oates Games.

Elsewhere in Issue # 6, there's an advertisement that talks about spreading cybernetic destruction. Takamo, anyone? Randy Ritnour didn't ask for the ad. Rather, I crafted it, and then sent it to him, and he was OK with it. Why should bio-life forms grab up all of the new players to sign up for that free run of Takamo? That's right, folks, the managing editor of Suspense & Decision magazine is a Cylon....er.....Cybernetic. Join me in hunting these bio-life forms down, and snuffing them out of Takamo existence. You

know that you want to!

Previously, player created ads for player affiliations in KJC Games' Phoenix:BSE made their way onto the pages of Suspense & Decision magazine. Alamaze featured an ad with green lettering. None of it happened by mere coincidence. All of this emanates from the service+ end of the PlayByMail.Net concept.

The PBM Activity Corner is yet another example of service+. Most PBM companies and game moderators have not, yet, taken advantage of this element of our service+ offerings. The PBM Activity Corner is service+ delivered via the magazine component.

Indeed, our free advertising component, itself, falls properly beneath the over-arching ambit of service+. In fact, it is, arguably, the single most visible element of PlayByMail.Net's service+ in action. Yet, it is hardly the only element of our service+ feature that is available to you.

Service+ can activate in more ways than just one. The PBM company or game moderator may initiate it, or I might do it, or it may originate via third party. It might be planned or spontaneous. Regardless of how it originates, all instances of service+ are geared towards effectuating the underlying directive: Facilitate PBM gaming.

Rick Loomis allowed me, previously, to update an old Heroic Fantasy ad. By recycling old PBM ads, they get exposed to new gamers via a PBM magazine for the 21st Century - Suspense & Decision. Even if you didn't recognize it, when you first encountered it, the service+ end of the PlayByMail.Net concept was already out there - waiting for you, and for others like you.

When game companies and game moderators don't interact, and when they don't bother to explain what they want or need, to grow their player bases, then that approach of silence and inaction negatively impacts the play by mail industry as a whole.

Issue # 6 also features Mark Nielsen, an independent game moderator, attempting to get some turn-based gaming action going with his megadungeon meltdown endeavor appearing, for the first time, in the pages of Suspense & Decision. Anyone out there reading this remember those independent PBM moderators that populated the play by mail gaming industry, back in the old days?

Well, apparently, they're back! Service+ facilitates enabling an individual game moderator to toss his hat into the PBM ring - even if only on a very small scale. He's not after the PBM moon. Rather, he's just wanting to glimpse the green cheese. PlayByMail.Net, as a concept, extends a tentacle in Mark Nielsen's direction, just as it has extended tentacles to all sorts of brand name PBM companies, whether they've individually chosen to take us up on the opportunities that we've presented to them or not.

And, leading the way for us, one and all, is our point man on the artistic end of things - our esteemed and appreciated front cover artist, Kav. As I write this to you, our readership, Kav has already sent word to me that, "Inking is proceeding!" Kav isn't a PBM gamer, as far as I know. Yet, he is an integral part of our efforts to extend an artistic tentacle to the world of gaming entertainment. But, why does the front cover art have to look like art that you might find in a comic book? Because, my friend and adversary, alike, it's part of a larger concept - *Entertainment through imagination!*

PlayByMail.Net

* If you are a game moderator for a PBM game or for some other form of turn-based game, and you have a special need or idea that we can assist you with, feel free to ask or inquire. We might can help.

* If you need a dedicated forum section for your game, so that your players can discuss the game, or if you need assistance in setting up a forum of your own, don't hesitate to seek our assistance in such matters. Don't assume there's a charge.

* If you have special advertising needs, or if you just need help creating some ads, in order to attract players or to grow your player base for your game, discuss it with us. Let us help you to achieve what you have in mind.

Ponder the possibilities!

Achieve your goals!

Reach for a better PBM future!

Game: **ALAMAZE** Web Site: www.alamaze.co Forum: www.kingdomsofarcania.net

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

Game Length: Up to 40 turns (or previous victory: games generally last about 4 months on average)
Pricing: Monthly subscription of $19.95 per month, for about seven turns (about 100 pages of results in pdf format) per month. More games available simultaneously at higher service levels.

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

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

The 15 Kingdoms of Alamaze Classic Steel (each player will play the part of one of these):
(full names and descriptions at http://www.alamaze.co/the-fantasy-kingdoms):
The Ancient Ones: A small cadre of very impressive and unique individuals preferring to work secretly.
The Black Dragons: The fastest moving forces, more in tune with humans than their larger cousins.
The Dark Elves: More covert and fanatically bent and perhaps more magical than their hated rivals.
The Demon Princes: Things weren't bad enough before? Maybe the most unique fantasy kingdom ever.
The Dwarven Lords: Expert with stone and gold, they also have political clout, and mountain prowess.
The High Elves: No introduction needed. A very balanced kingdom with good geography.
The Stone Giants: Powerful race centrally positioned. Everyone *says* they want to be their friend.
The Gnomes: Consumed with alchemy, they cherish all magic. A portal they seek to attack the Dwarves.
The Rangers: A fun kingdom with multiple lines of strategy possible requiring skillful play in all facets.
The Red Dragons: A fire-breathing pure military with great mobility and ultimate big-stick diplomacy.
The Sorcerer: Maybe the kingdom with the most spellcasters and the best mid-level spells.
The Trolls: Big, mean, strong, regenerative, feared, and not that bright. The most role-played kingdom.
The Underworld: Pirates, assassins, thieves, dealers in extortion, subterfuge, and information. Popular.
The Warlock: Best battle magic, lowest magic research cost. Geographically central, diplomacy needed.
The Witchlord: Rumor has it he is the most powerful mage, and destined to rule all of Alamaze.

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

VISIT & SIGNUP AT HTTP://WWW.ALAMAZE.CO/SIGN-UP/

The Top Five Game Designers of Our Generation

Rick McDowell

"Of Our Lives" might be more appropriate, but let's consider "Our Generation" to mean as long as we have been playing games, rather than strictly the last 30 years.

In the current environment, game designers remain largely anonymous to their playing public. Who designed World of Warcraft (WoW)? Who knows? It's not in the interest of the company to promote their designers over their product, and a production of that scope has scores of committees of artists and programmers assigned to every aspect of the game, so no one individual is really responsible for the game and no one is indispensable to the project. Hugely successful financially and very corporate.

But the games that those of us who play or might play PBEM games, likely do have the mind of one designer behind them, with his vision, drive, innovation and style behind it and responsible for the final result. So what follows is my take on the greatest game designers who have produced the manifestations of their imaginations in our lifetimes. A caveat is that to be included, a game must have achieved both commercial success, so that most people reading this are aware of them, and have advanced strategy game design. There are no shooters, MMORPG, or games that have a gee whiz factor based on computer graphics instead of deep, rewarding game play. There are no cute games like Donkey Kong or Mario Kart – this is a review of fairly serious strategy games. That said, there are also no PBM games (episodic strategy games) here today, as none are well known enough to qualify, even if the design itself might warrant consideration. Perhaps they can be the subject of a controversial future article by some brave soul.

Is design that important? As we said, look at WoW or any other mega-production of recent times: there is no prominent design credit, as contrasted with the games on this list. WoW might list many artists in lead credits before disclosing a team of level designers. WoW and many current games are driven by graphics, not game design. The names that follow are all driven by innovative design, not splashy graphics. This perspective is that game design is an art form in itself, not a by-product of another art.

#5 Steve Jackson (Steve Jackson Games). Jackson has been an incredibly prolific designer with dozens of games to his credit. Among the best of his are Illuminati, GURPS, and OGRE. He designed card games, board games, RPG's and a couple computer games. Mainly micro-games, light on components and heavy on fast moving game mechanics and innovations, they were inexpensive, fun, and playable in about two hours. The Illuminati game was the one that most appealed to me, and fostered a PBM game of the same name.

#4 Reiner Knizia (Settlers of Catan). The face of the current wave of "designer board games" rampant in Europe, 'Settlers" is his best known work. It plays great as a four player game, and features a host of innovations. Players first jointly assemble the map for each game by connecting large hex pieces of differing terrain that provide various resources. Resources are accumulated in various combinations to allow for the construction of villages, cities, roads, or accumulating development cards that can purchase soldiers, other resource cards, or provide victory points. A game takes 2 -3 hours, which is pretty reasonable for most board game players. Among the best design aspects is that the players are not primarily oriented toward eliminating their fellow players. In fact, trading resources is a major aspect of the game, conducted openly and often with competing verbal bids.

#3 – Sid Meier (Civilization). Sid provides the only representative of computer game designers in this list. When discussing strategy games of our generation, it would be rare that the Civilization series doesn't come up early in the conversation. A really elegant, groundbreaking design, it is about the archetype of the "4X" strategy game genre of exploration, expansion, exploitation and extermination. Its innovations and advancements include the technology research tree, treaties, culture, religion, happiness and a good, not overly complicated economic system.

#2 – Gary Gygax (Dungeons & Dragons). Gary was the primary designer of the original D&D release. The top game for at least two decades, it reached the rare status of being an important piece of Americana culture. A loose set of rules that gave structure to concepts largely played out in the imagination, and also perhaps the first game to involve a game master, it was a truly brilliant creation, was imitated endlessly, and is now played by a whole new generation. A masterpiece that enriched lives and created new dimensions for friendship. It was clearly inspirational for many PBEM games to follow.

#1 – Richard Garfield (Magic the Gathering). Another genius-level creation, Garfield created the collectible trading card genre, although that term hardly does the game justice. The aesthetics are also a strength, with the concept of different kinds of magic having different colors and each with strengths and weaknesses, it introduced the intoxicating strategy of deck creation, where a player chooses what forces may come into play, or deny his opponent of assets by what cards are included in his deck of at least 60 cards. The game rose to such heights that it fostered a professional tour with prizes of up to $100,000 for a world champion, who became a respected celebrity known around the world to the game's followers. Deck designs became famous and spawned legions of deck arch-types and variants.

<u>Honorable Mention:</u>

Michael Gray (Shogun). Michael isn't given credit on the game box of the best of the Gamemaster series of games by Milton Bradley (including Axis & Allies), as that was not the fashion when Shogun was released around 1987. But he took a framework from that very popular Axis & Allies game and provided many new elements in his beautifully rendered Shogun game that was the culmination of that great series. Shogun introduced the covert element of ninjas, bidding among players for elements like Ronin and Ninja, did not require a "capture

the flag" element typical of the time. I give Michael the credit that the whole line of Gamemaster deserves for keeping strategy board games flourishing in an era where they were receiving little attention.

Lord British (Richard Garriott). The Ultima series of computer RPG's dominated in its time – the late 1980's into the mid 1990's. Famous for showing up in the costume of his persona, he was principal in forming the beginnings of what became the norm for game play elements of computer RPG's.

Hope you enjoyed, and of course, there can be many other opinions.

What did you miss??

Here's your second chance to catch up on your PBM reading@

Battle of the Five Armies

The sweep and grandeur of Tolkien's Middle-earth brought vividly to life in an award-winning gaming system.

Battle of the Five Armies is a simplified version of the Middle-earth Play-By-Mail game designed to provide new players with an introduction to the world of Middle-earth. Set in the time of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Hobbit some sixty years before the events portrayed in Lord of the Rings, you can take the role of commanding the Goblins, the Warg Riders, the Elves, the Dwarves or the Northmen of Middle-earth.

You've seen the movie, now dare you take the next step and lead your forces in conquest of Middle-earth?

Can you make the difference between victory and defeat? Contact us to find out.

Special Introductory offer for new players

Play a Full Game for only £10

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

Middle Earth PBM Games, Office A, 340 North Road, Cardiff CF 14 3BP, UK

tel.: 029 2062 5539 (8am-6:30pm Monday-Friday)

me@middleearthgames.com

Middle Earth Games

present

The battle of the five armies

PlayByMail.Net presents

PBM Wiki

Help grow the Wiki!

Swashbuckler

www.agema.org.uk

Being a play-by-mail and play-by-email game of *derring-do* and adventure set in the world of **The Glory of Kings!**

Online Roleplaying Communities

The collaborative element in MMORPGs

Jim Kemeny & Janet Savage

Globetrotter's article in Issue 115 On Screen: the competitive element in MMORPGs is certainly correct to point out the one-sided emphasis on fighting skills in this genre and the intense competitiveness it involves. Most players play for the thrill of exploring dungeons, killing monsters and looting their possessions, or killing other players? characters in wars or gladiatorial contests. But there is much more to these games than that. In this article we want to take a closer look at what else can be done in MMORPGs, and particularly a very different - and in many ways more traditional - understanding of what is meant by *role-playing* that places a lot of reliance on collaboration between players rather than competition.

There are obvious alternative roles to fighting, such as merchant, priest, and craft workers. Craft workers in particular provide important services to fighters by making armour and weapons. But there are also ordinary peaceful citizens, poor and leading rather humdrum lives, like farmers, fishers, beggars, cooks, entertainers, bards, detectives, cartographers, scribes, monks and gardeners. And there are also some independent traditional craftworkers (smiths, tailors and the like) that are the player's main character and not just an *alt* a secondary character to provide the fighter main character with wargear.

When the first author of this article wanted to join a MMORPG and was looking at the games on offer, Ultima Online http://www.uo.com appealed partly because it was based on a well-developed in-game history or story line originating in pre-computer times. This was adapted to online gaming involving a gem of immortality that shattered, creating shards (servers) and facets, dark (Felucca) and light (Trammel), named after the two moons of the world. The latter in particular was of interest because it was intended for pvm and consensual pvp, in contrast to free-for-all player-killing on Felucca.

But most important, Trammel was the home of a number of substantial groups of role-players. Several shards in the USA - Pacific, Catskills, Great Lakes - and most heavily used of all, Europa - have a large number of collaborative roleplayers who devise carefully-balanced rules of engagement, discussed and decided based on consensual combat and interaction.

Collaborative roleplayers often have their own umbrella organisation or at least their own forums. So, for example, western North America (Pacific shard) has the Pacific Rolepaying Community. Europe (Europa shard) has CoRE (Community of Role-players, Europa). Many of the players running these roleplaying groups are dedicated veterans, and it takes a lot of commitment in time and effort, as the second author of this article can testify.

The guilds cover almost every conceivable activity: knightly orders, armies and militia, city states, player-run towns and villages, trades associations and merchant guilds, undercover organisations for spies and assassins, nobles, crafters, serfs, mercenaries, rangers, bandits, thieves, pirates, elves, orcs, undead, and many, many more.

What distinguishes this kind of roleplaying from merely taking on the role of a fighter or mage? The fact is that a game that exclusively focuses on hack-and-slay quickly palls. There is a limit to how many balrogs

and dragons you can slay before boredom sets in. The companies marketing these kind of games do *up the ante* periodically, introducing new lands and dungeons and more dangerous monsters. But the problem of holding player interest in the long-run remains.

What roleplayers do is to add a further layer of complexity and *reality* (if that's the right word in this context) to hack-and-slay. They create a social, political and cultural world that the game otherwise lacks, based on the in-game cities and towns, which to most non-roleplayers are simply places to buy and sell. The main instrument for this is the guild system, which is extended from the original concept of a group of friends fighting together. Guilds are created to provide a player-designed political system, with a player-ruler and a hierarchy of political power, often including several classes - a military arm of course, but also clergy and a craftworker classes, and perhaps also a secret service. Players choose a path and work their way up the hierarchy.

In addition, there are numerous other routes into MMORPG roleplaying. The loner who does not want to join a guild or guild members who want to do their own thing have a wide variety of options. They may buy a plot of land and build a tavern to attract adventurers to slake their thirst after a hard fight, and even employ entertainers to draw more players to the tavern. They may build up a library of books or a museum of rare items and artifacts, or start a farm. The possibilities are only limited by player imagination. But the viability of this approach depends on the existence of a community of collaborating roleplayers: characters to discuss the latest war or political intrigue.

Importantly, then, roleplayers have their characters talk to each other. An important principle in all roleplay is to talk "in character" and not use shorthand, like tbh (to be honest) or alpha-numeric expressions like n00b. Roleplaying communities also avoid alpha-numeric character names or the names of the best known fiction heroes like Gandalf, going instead for names reflecting the world the characters inhabit or their profession.

For creating a character is not just a matter of selecting skills. Rather it is a way of bringing that character to life in a convincing and aesthetically-satisfying manner. Players usually think out a background for their character, often just a paragraph or so, but sometimes much more, perhaps including a simple geneology and even a written background family history. And in everything they do or say they try to put themseves in their character's situation and act out their role.

Members of the roleplaying community put on frequent 'events', often in the evenings or weekends when more players are online. These can take many different forms, apart of course from the ubiquitous guild 'hunts'. They may be a training session for the soldiers of a guild, a regular tavern night put on by the tavern-owner, fairs/markets where crafters sell their wares (including black markets!), a religious service, a wedding, a birthday party, story-reading discussion-circle in a library, a play, a sports competition, a competition with judges for the best bardic tale with a large prize for the winner, or gladiatorial contests. There are also scenarios devised around a storyline and played out over several sessions, with an open-ended outcome to be decided by warfare or other conflict. With a lot of dedication and enthusiasm roleplayers use the basic on-line game, buiding on it to create a living world of characters and institutions.

These roleplaying communities within MMORPGs can include hundreds of players, and many get to know each other through on-line messaging, chat-rooms and out-of-game meets. Its probably fair to say that traditional monster-fighting still comprises a part of the interest of these roleplayers - for many perhaps even a significant part. But

they have the commitment to widen their gaming interests in collaborative projects and colonise what are relatively small corners of games that otherwise cater for much larger numbers of competitive and purely hack-and-slay players. The existence of a facet in Ultima Online designed to minimise player-killers helps a lot. That many choose a long-established game with depth and a wide variety of items, even though the graphics may be inferior to the latest MMORPGs, says much for player ingenuity and inventiveness.

There are things which make Ultima Online particularly suited for roleplaying. The first, and perhaps most important, is that it's not a levelling game. A completely new character can go anywhere (although the depths of dungeons are perhaps not advisable!) and roleplay anything they like. Of course having some skill makes it easier - you can call yourself a wise old mage full of ancient wisdom, but then being unable even to cast a fifth circle spell reliably is a bit of a let down. But that's where acting comes into play, and UO allows all characters to interact, however skilled or experienced in game, which makes the roleplaying very quick and easy to get into. It also means that veteran players are not forced to do boring repetitive low level events just to interact with new players and get them up to higher levels. It therefore encourages communities for all players at whatever level of skill, with very in-depth immersive roleplaying, and allows for a great deal of character continuity and development.

The second is the player housing. There have been times when houses were very expensive and difficult to come by on some servers. But times are changing a little, and the sheer fun of designing and decorating your own dwelling (a country house, or fairytale castle, or evil cultists' temple, or museum, or tavern, or old witch's hut, or library, or guardhouse, or orc fort, or tree house, or .... the only limit is imagination) is a big plus point for many people. Furniture can be crafted and many decoration items are readily available, flowers and trees can be grown and placed to make gardens, and having in-game storage other than just a bank box is very useful!

The third is being able to put things down. This might sound silly, but we don't know of another online game where you can actually put out a table and chairs with food, drink and candlesticks for a romantic picnic in a forest clearing; or set up a marketplace with stalls selling all manner of goods, all of which can be displayed; or build a barricade with boxes; or make pictures with pieces of coloured cloth; or play a game like bagball ... it's a great part of UO and makes the environment far more flexible. Being able to have an element of influence over surroundings like that is a huge bonus for roleplaying.

In short, role-playing that goes beyond designing a character with a particular set of skills by creating key elements of everyday life. Politics and power are dimensions of MMORPGs that are easy to overlook but add great depth as well as human and management skills to an otherwise often soul-less game. The fact that the graphics are average means that they don’t distract from roleplaying, and - importantly for many on low budgets - the game does not demand the latest in computer technology.

This article was first published in the gaming magazine, Flagship, in Issue # 116 of that magazine.

[November/December 2005 pp. 40-41]

PlayByMail.Net wishes to encourage the gaming community to keep Jim Kemeny, Carol Mulholland, and Peter Perrin and his father in your hearts and prayers for swift and full recoveries. Illness is never easy, and drains both the affected and those who care for and about them.

HEROIC FANTASY

FANTASY ROLE PLAYING BY MAIL

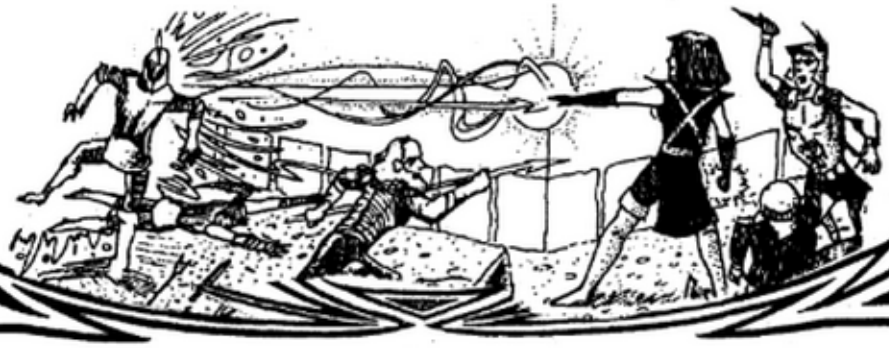
YOU direct a party of up to fifteen fighters and magic users (humans, elves, dwarves, fairies, gremlins, even trolls) through a dungeon maze killing monsters, gathering treasure, and hunting for magical prizes.

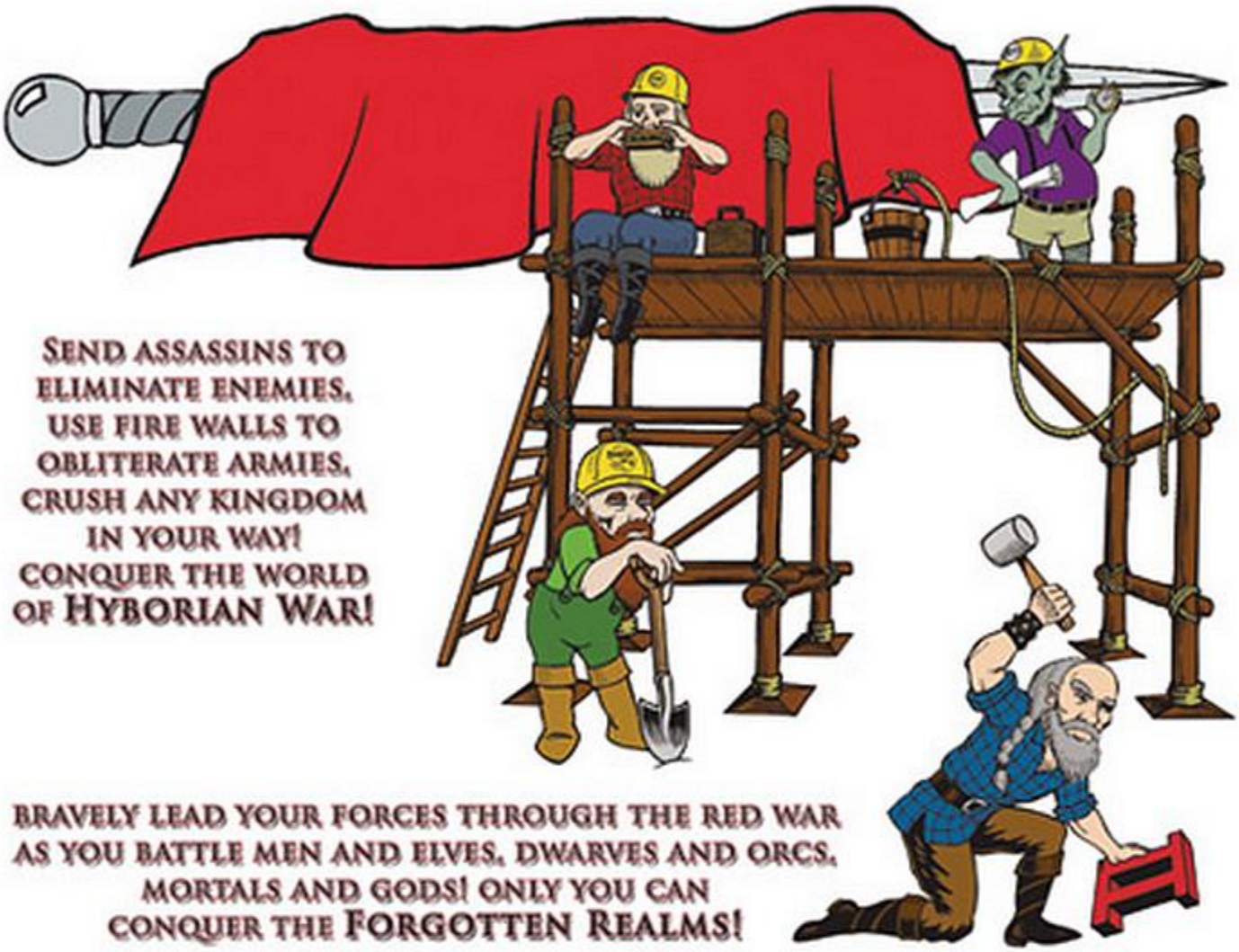
There are currently four levels (ultimately, there will be five) and over 400 players already exploring the depths. This game has been extensively play-tested, and has been running since 1982. The per-turn fee is only $3.00, and for this one fee, you get to move all 15 of your characters. They can stay together, or split up into several parties moving in different directions, all for one single turn fee! No "extra action fees,' ever! Our game is completely computer-run, so no human referee interferes with your enjoyment - *and there are seldom any errors.* (If we DO make an error on your turn, we will refund **DOUBLE** your turn fee!)

Flying Buffalo, Inc. has been running play by mail games for 44 years. We are the very first professional PBM company. We are members of the Game Manufacturers Association (**GAMA**). In addition to Heroic Fantasy, we have science fiction games, war games, and medieval games. Write today for a free copy of our PBM catalog, or send $2 for the rules to HEROIC FANTASY. (Please do not ask to be in any game, until you have seen a copy of the rules).

Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O. Box 8467, Scottsdale, AZ 85282

WWW.FLYINGBUFFALO.COM





SEND ASSASSINS TO ELIMINATE ENEMIES, USE FIRE WALLS TO OBLITERATE ARMIES, CRUSH ANY KINGDOM IN YOUR WAY! CONQUER THE WORLD OF HYBORIAN WAR!

BRAVELY LEAD YOUR FORCES THROUGH THE RED WAR AS YOU BATTLE MEN AND ELVES, DWARVES AND ORCS, MORTALS AND GODS! ONLY YOU CAN CONQUER THE FORGOTTEN REALMS!

FORGE YOUR FIGHTING SKILLS WITH THE BLOOD OF YOUR ENEMY ON THE ARENA SANDS. HEAR THE ROAR OF THE CROWD, FEEL THE PRESSURE, DISCOVER IF YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE... DUELMASTER!

REALITY SIMULATIONS - GAMES YOU PLAY THROUGH THE MAIL.

WRITE TODAY FOR FREE SETUP AND RULES

REALITY SIMULATIONS P.O. BOX 22400 TEMPE, AZ 85285
(480) 967-7979 * FAX (480) 894-2028 E-MAIL RSI@REALITY.COM

FORGOTTEN REALMS IS A TRADEMARK OF TSR, INC. (C) 1994 TSR, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
USED BY REALITY SIMULATIONS, INC. UNDER LICENSE FROM TSR, INC. PBM GAME DESIGN (C) 1994 REALITY SIMULATIONS, INC.

Submission Deadline

for Issue # 7 is

May 20th, 2014

PBM needs YOU!

TAKAMO
UNIVERSE

PLAY THE ORIGINAL TAKAMO FOR FREE!
EMAIL PBEM@TAKAMOUNIVERSE.COM
TO START YOUR EMPIRE

WWW.TAKAMOUNIVERSE.COM

REGIME
change
AGEMA

Lunar Landing

Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail

Charles Mosteller

Agema Publications Forum

http://agema.darkbb.com/

Agema is a game company with deep PBM roots. It is also a PBM company with quite a developed portfolio of game products for gamers to choose from.

However, the Agema forum does not reflect a high degree of broad player activity. The forum does have activity, and certainly isn't dead, but neither is it bursting at the seams with activity. Rather, postings tend to be sparse and infrequent.

The Agema website has underwent a major visual overhaul very recently. This denotes an interest in attracting and growing the company's player base for its games. Yet, this overhaul did not extend to the forum, which continues to suffer from a stale and dated look.

The total number of registered forum users at the Agema forum tallies up to seventy-six registered forum users. The Agema forum has been active since at least April of 2008.

During our landing at this target location, the forum statistics revealed that no less than nine registered forum members had visited that forum during the previous twelve hours, which by general PBM site standards, should probably considered to be respectable.

This Lunar Landing took place on May 2nd, 2014, and the most recent posting posted to the forum was earlier this same day. That this current posting was done by Richard Watts, Agema's owner, is reassuring (due to the recent vintage) and denotes active interest in the player base and games on the part of the company.

Recent game offerings evidence a continuing innovation in place at the Agema imagination foundry, as new game products continue to be developed, games such as Regime Change, which features an mp3 audio media cast. This genuinely qualifies as innovation by a PBM company.

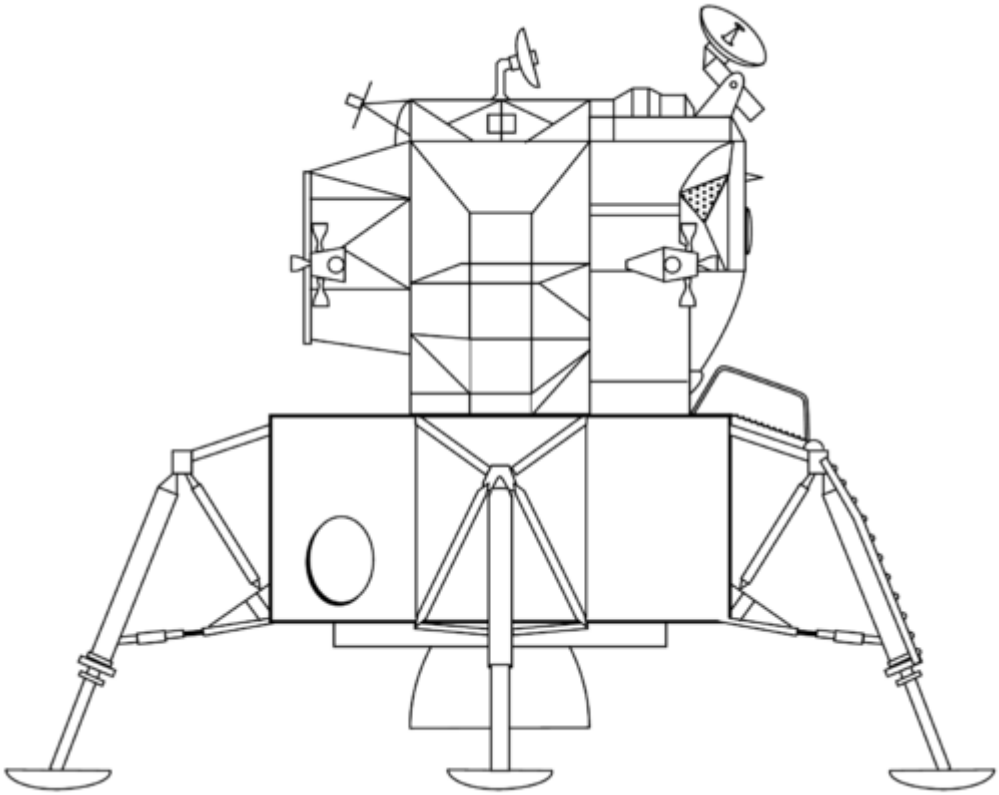
The reasons why Agema's active player base appears so small, relative to the fact that the company remains actively engaged in developing new gaming content and products lies beyond the scope of the lunar landing's sensor array.

CONCLUSION: Activity-wise, the Agema forum is properly characterized as a moon colony of play by mail. No vast civilization of gamers currently reside here, nor was any evidence discovered that leads one to conclude that such was ever the case.

Even still, with terraforming of its methodologies, notably of its pricing structure, the site's terrain might become more hospitable to travellers who happen upon this site.

Richard Watts is to be commended for keeping this PBM outpost alive and active, but surely, it must get lonely catering to such a small population of gamers. The vast majority of Agema's potential remains undeveloped, though its game offerings denote rich veins of imagination.

Lunar Landings



Exploring

the

Moon Colonies

of

Play-By-Mail

Where We're Heading. . .

Well, we sort of blew it, on meeting the publication deadline, this time around. But, even still, you've got Issue # 6 in your hands, now, so all is well with the world, again.

At least, I hope that it is.

Mark Wardell has stepped down, as assistant editor for Suspense & Decision. However, he may still continue to contribute articles, now and again, as his time and schedule allow. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mark for his efforts.

Time is a precious commodity, and there never seems to be enough to get everything done, no matter who you are. Life often visits time-consuming complications upon us, one and all. I wish Mark well going forward, even as I prepare to redouble my own efforts to keep this magazine chugging along.

Bernd Jaehnigen joined our magazine as an assistant editor, last issue. I think that our readers will begin to see Bernd's imprint upon Suspense & Decision, over the next couple of issues.

Additionally, PlayByMail.Net site user Ramblurr is renewing his interest in PBM, and he will be joining in the effort to improve the PlayByMail.Net ball of wax. The site should begin to transition to a more integrated state of affairs, as I've tasked Ramblurr with a few things that really need doing.

This magazine, Suspense & Decision, will also continue to change, as we hone it to further refine the way that we present articles to you. Rick McDowell has been nudging me to present certain basic info pertaining to games, and to have this info accompany articles, as I publish them.

I'll have to figure out how I want to format articles, in order to accommodate Rick's request, but I do believe that his idea has merit and is worth pursuing. Maybe I can foist this off on Bernd? Ssshhh! Don't tell him, though. Let's let it be a surprise.

Another thing that I'm looking at, going forward, is a different take on the standard interview. I call it the Mini-View.

What's a Mini-View? Well, it's where I will send a single question out to game companies and game moderators, and for each question posed, responses would be sought from multiple different individuals. The success of this idea will depend heavily upon game moderators being willing to answer the questions that get submitted to them.

Instead of sending twenty or so questions to a single game moderator, the Mini-View would be more like sending a single question to a dozen different moderators. Then, readers can enjoy comparing their respective answers to the same question.

For the game moderators, it would be a fairly quick way to join the interview dialogue, without getting bogged down in a sea of questions.

Just as a reminder, of sorts, the initial goal that I set for myself was to try and commit to an initial run of twelve issues - enough for one issue per month, with a monthly rate of publication.

Beginning with the next issue, Issue # 7, I will begin the process of analyzing where I think that we stand, how I think that we are faring, and whether or even if I should extend the publication run of this magazine past Issue # 12.

The analysis process isn't something to fear, for any who might be concerned. Change, in fact, is a constant part of the magazine development process, anyway. It really isn't a process where the only issue to decide is whether to keep going or to abruptly stop publication, once Issue # 12 is released (assuming that we are fortunate enough to make it that far).

Six issues into this adventure, while demands on my time always seem to make meeting publication deadlines a challenge, the specter of burnout really hasn't materialized, at all - except maybe as a figment of imagination in the minds of others. I don't mean to trivialize the prospect of burnout, nor what such would mean for the magazine, were it ever to materialize as fact.

However, I think that it is equally worth remembering and keeping in mind that my interest in the subject of play by mail gaming, specifically, and in turn-based gaming, in general, is neither of recent origin nor of passing interest to me.

At some point, I'll have to hand the baton off to someone else, of course. Either that, or I will die, eventually. But, those considerations aside and fully accounted for, my interest in PBM gaming covers a span of almost thirty years - nearly three full decades. It is not a flame easily extinguished.

Beyond Suspense & Decision, there's other PBM-related stuff going on that I am involved with. For example, the PBM Wiki is only one wiki. There's another wiki that I hope to bring to fruition, in due time.

Between now and Issue # 12, if you pay really close attention, the service+ component of the PlayByMail.Net concept should begin to become more noticeable, and hopefully, along with this, the PBM industry will begin to both feel more engaged and actually be more engaged.

Currently, disengagement is a very big problem. At least, from my perspective, it is. It's not that we can't try to provide coverage of the PBM industry, nor promote the hobby of play by mail gaming without the involvement of the PBM companies, themselves. Certainly, we proceed forward, irrespective of whether or how much PBM companies are engaged.

On our end, we will continue to adapt and to probe for openings and opportunities to further grow interest in play by mail and other forms of turn-based gaming.

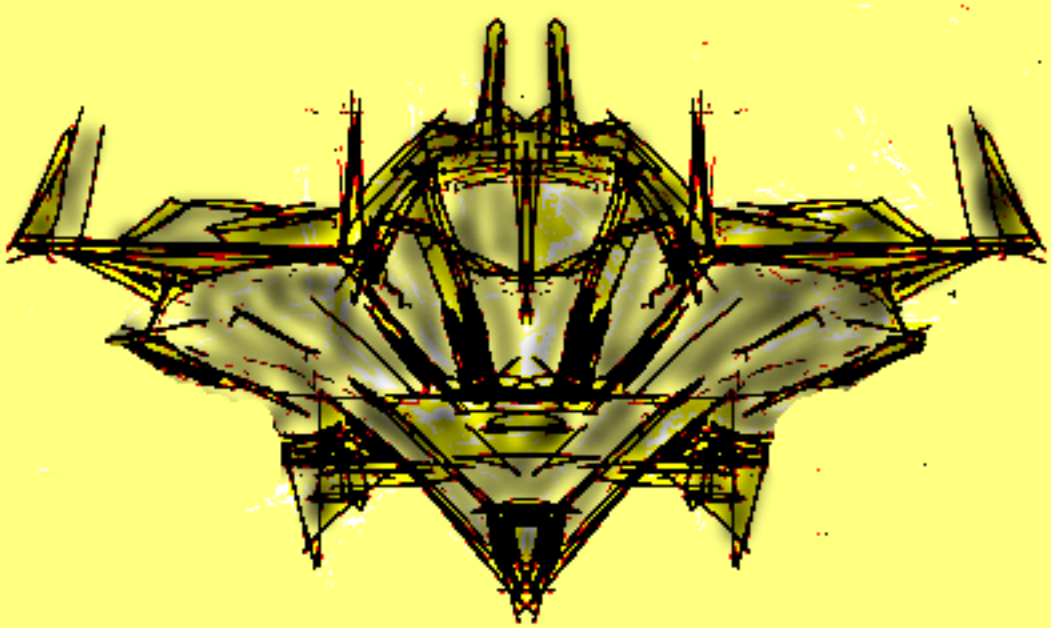
I want to bring some coverage of board games onboard, simply because I find them to be so colorful and interesting and fascinating, even though I, myself, hardly ever play any. Only occasionally, which is both a shame and a pity.

And, we also need to focus more on game design.

www.warbarron.com

...a place for old-school gamers to meet, greet, boast, and keep in touch. Hyborian War and a whole lot more!

To Boldly Go



A free single viewpoint play by web strategy game for up to 200 players.

Now in Public Beta

http://tbg.asciiking.com

PBM Activity Corner

News, Developments, & Bragging Rights

From Game Companies and Game Moderators

Talisman Games

Yes, Galac-Tac is back, after a long hiatus! If you've played Galac-Tac before, it was probably under our former company name of Delta Games. As you might have noticed from our ad, we're running via the web now instead of using paper mail, but we still need players. New Galac-Tac games start as rapidly as they can fill up with about a dozen players all wanting to play with the same turn speed, so we need plenty of people willing to play both fast (every day or two) and slow (every week or two) games. Since a Galac-Tac turn may take from 10 minutes to several hours to compose (depending on the size of your empire and your attention to details), you may select speeds that best suit your available gaming time. And if you get tired of waiting for the turn deadline to come around, sign up for another game to play at the same time! You may play a separate empire in as many games as you can handle.

Our new web site is currently functional, but very basic, as we attempt to accommodate all kinds of browsers. Parts of it (such as the in-game messaging system) are still under construction. Since we're still working on it, and while we're building up our player base again, we're offering a special deal. Normally, Galac-Tac costs a flat rate of $5 per month to play all the turns in as many games you want. But for a limited time, anyone who signs up and pays for at least one month gets an additional bonus of TWELVE free months of play time! If you're a previous player of our games, you'll even get MORE free time to encourage you to play again. (Our previous web-based players should find that their old login names and passwords will still work, if you can remember them - contact us if you have trouble.)

So come on over to play! Show us all that you've got the best economic system, ship designs, and military strategy in the galaxy. We'll be waiting for you at:

www.talisman-games.com

Davin Church

WoW Games

Hi,

I apologize that I said I was going to get you an extended article for this issue and it's well past the deadline. We were going to link the article to the launch of a crowd funding campaign but we've swapped platforms at the last minute and are looking to get set up on Pozible rather than Kickstarter. I don't think we'll have it all sorted out before Issue #6. Feel free to put the War of Wizards ad in again if you have space to fill. I'll get that article to you A.S.A.P., although it will probably be an early Issue #7 submission rather than making #6.

www.warofwizards.com

Cheers,

Dave

Flying Buffalo

Flying Buffalo's Annual PBM Convention will be July 18-20 in Scottsdale, Arizona. (Yes, it's hot here in July, but we'll be inside the air conditioned building all day!) See our web page for details.

We have SEVEN players waiting for the next Nuclear Destruction game. I'd like to have at least ten. If you sign up now, and mention you heard about the ten cents per turn offer, you can be in the game for ten cents per turn (the original price back in 1970!), plus a one-time $5 setup fee. (That's if you get your turn results by email -- if you want them by postal mail that will be 50 cents per turn). The rules can be downloaded from our webpage for free.

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Rick Loomis

Agema

REGIME CHANGE is now available to pre-order, and shall be available from AGEMA within two weeks of being ordered!

As a player you command a spaceship and are on the run from the Terran Solar Federation. As such you are heading through uncharted space, facing unknown perils in your bid to survive, while dreaming of regime change to overthrow the hated evil empire of the TSF!

+++ We interrupt your program to bring you the following breaking news. The government of the Republic is under threat from dissident elements of the banned terrorist network formerly known as the Majoritists. Latest reports suggest rebels have blown up the central barracks and are attempting to storm the House of Representatives. Elements of the Republican Guard are fighting back bravely and… +++

+++ Rebels are right now in the process of taking over the central government. Data libraries and communication devices have become non-functional. The frequent sound of gunfire and explosions around the city prove the situation is both violent and serious. +++

There will be star maps, environmental reports, and news of latest technological developments (changes are so fast your upgraded spaceship will soon be obsolete again!). You'll give orders and perform actions as you battle against the conditions and a host of hostile elements! This is a space opera, and you're the actors!

The really big difference is the inclusion of the Terran Solar Federation's (TSF) News Mediacast. Each game turn on top of your own information you'll get the 'official' view via an audio mediacast (in mp3 format)! This will be censored by your enemies in the TSF but give hints of what may be going on (or it could just be misleading propaganda!).

So, each turn you'll have PDFs containing your own information, and an mp3 audio file

of the radio broadcast from the TSF, all delivered via email! Alternatively you'll be able to play by mail through the post, and get printed turns plus a CD copy of the audio file! AGEMA is entering the future with this new concept in gaming!

Pre-orders can now be placed for the rules and introductory audio for this, Agema's new epic PBM/PBEM game of science-fiction adventure and interstellar conflict, Regime Change.

Have you ever enjoyed sci-fi adventures on TV, or on film, or in books? Then this is for you, something very different – escapism into the worlds of the far future and into dangerous space in your own starship; the main difference is you direct the main character in this adventure!

More details at: www.agema.org.uk

Regards,

Richard

Jason Oates Games

I'm opening up the last area of the Company Commander map for new players. I'm offering free play, all of May, for new Company Commanders.

Regards Jason

Alamaze News

Alamaze Resurgent celebrated its one year anniversary in April, 2014. That marked one year since Alamaze returned to its players in its new format and under the direction of its original designer.

In that year, we started more than 60 Alamaze games in 8 different formats, on a new map with new rules, new attractive PDF results, processed more than 10,000 turns, had players make more than 10,000 posts on our forum, and processed and got back in players' hands all turns within a few hours of the turn deadline for all 10,000. We run games twice a week, at about $2 per turn, in a game that has won every major PBM Award. Yes, none of that is a misprint.

Alamaze is a game with up to 15 players per contest, each controlling a fantasy kingdom and directing strategy concerning economics, military, political, covert, and diplomatic issues. It has been loved by its players for 25 years.

We don't rest on our laurels, however. In addition to introducing a new map and five new formats in our first year back with Resurgent, we are constantly adding to our players' experience. Our latest strategic change is that we now have changed our unique Early Strategic Objective model, so that players select their kingdom's objectives on a creative point system, instead of them being assigned. Similarly, players now can select their kingdom's Secret Victory Objective. These new breakthroughs allow the player to role play and guide his kingdom as he wishes, rather than according to a pre-ordained style.

In support of Suspense & Decision, any player signing up for a new Alamaze account on our website, www.alamaze.co, that mentions Suspense & Decision in his comment field in the brief website signup form will get the first month at Scout Level Service for only $9.95 (normally $19.95). That's 7 turns for $10 bucks. If you have any curiosity about Alamaze at all, how can you not take up that gauntlet? Once you sign up for your account, claim your kingdom on our forum thread for Games Forming, which is:

http://kingdomsofarcania.net/forum/forumdisplay.php?fid=20

See you on the fields of battle in Alamaze!

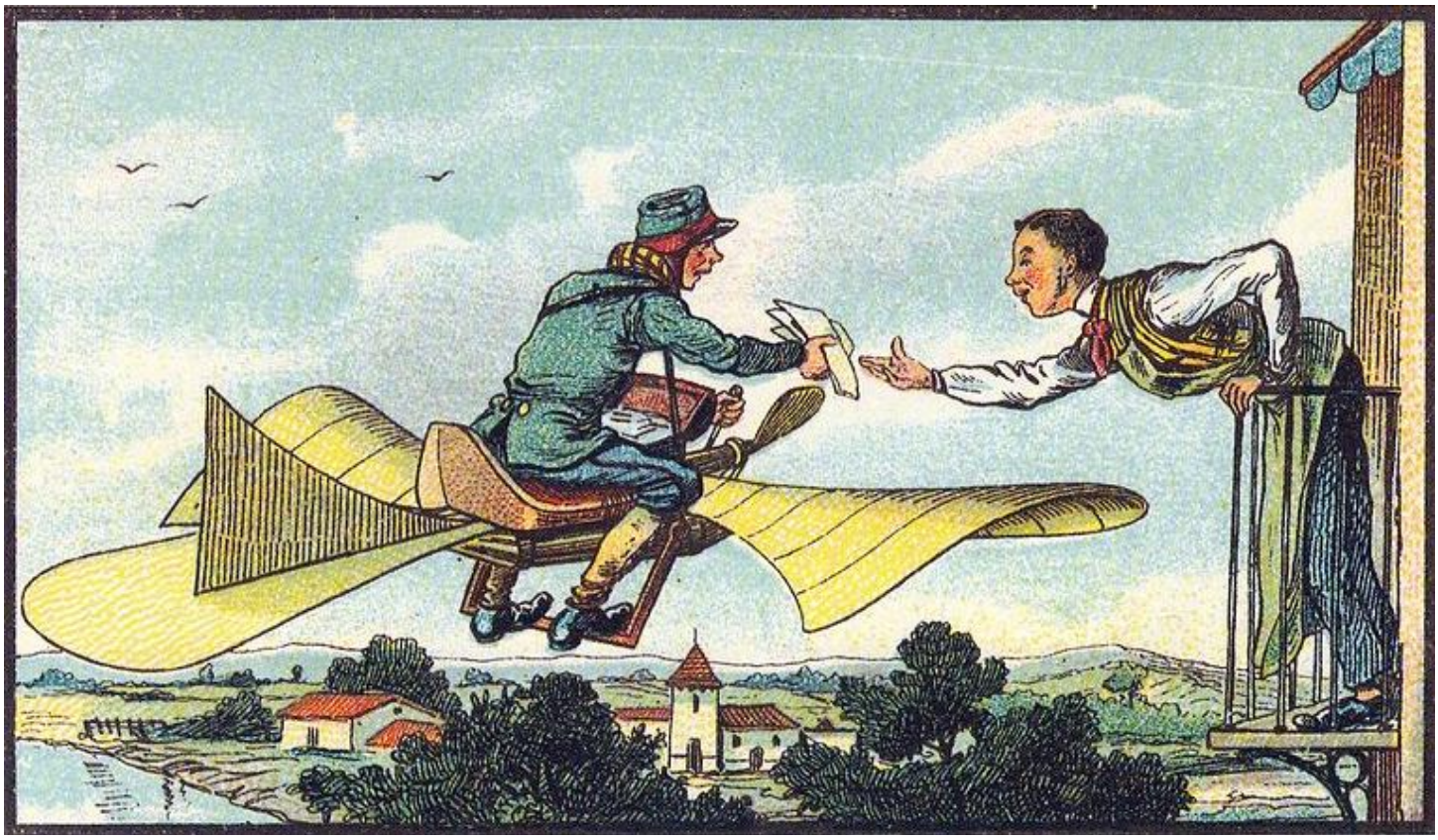
www.alamaze.co

Sign up now!

Send your company or moderator news for inclusion into this section of our magazine to:

GrimFinger@GrimFinger.Net

Subject Heading: PBM ACTIVITY CORNER



16 different races to play

Over 300 unit types to recruit

More than 20 heroes

10 branches of magic

65 spells

43 building types

Hundreds of wandering monsters to fight

Numerous special places to explore

More Info Next Issue!

To Spur Them Over The Ice

The Origin of a PBM Gamer

Charles Mosteller

Let the story be told. Let the tale be said. I began my life as a PBM gamer as a blonde reaver of the icy north.

Just look at me, now. Barely any hair, at all, and nary so much as a strand of it of the blonde variety. It's never been blonde, in fact, but that is largely beside the point. Once the mind clicks and the imagination kicks in, it really doesn't matter.

So, what got me started playing PBM games? Words, my friend. Just plain words.

In other words, pardon the pun, it was text that attracted me, that dangled itself before my eyes, that lured me in.

ASGARD (Medium Kingdom) -- Blonde reavers of the icy north, the mailed warriors of the Aesir are held in check only by their equally ferocious kin the Vanir to the west, the grim Cimmerians southward, and by arcane Hyperborea to the east. Loosely organized, the clans await their forging to a cause, or a great captain of men, to spur them over the ice towards bright and bloody conquest!

Having been so foolishly naive to send off for an information packet from Reality Simulations, Inc., I really wasn't prepared for what arrived in my mailbox not so very long thereafter.

Oh, sure, it looks innocent enough, when it arrives in that big envelope. Even as I unloaded it, and browsed through it, no big deal. Right?

Right! Well, sort of. Uh, no. No, that's not right. Let me clarify things for you. Bear with me a bit, if you will. Pull up a chair, and sit with me for a while, and let me tell you what it was like, way back then.

The problem isn't that these information packets, start-up packs as I like to call them, contain lots of text, or even the occasional map. Speaking of maps, did I mention the wall map for Hyborian War? Oh, trust me. I know better, now. None of it is by coincidence. They knew full well what they were doing, when they sent me all that stuff, after I wrote to them and asked for it.

But, you see, I didn't know. Oh, sure, I knew that it was a game, of some kind. But, how does such an otherwise simple packet of information evolve into a lifetime pursuit of gaming fun?

What they do is they turn your own imagination against you. Well, no, that's not it. Let me try again. What they do is utilize text to knock on the door of your imagination.

Once they rouse it from its slumber, it tends to take over. It wants to know more. It

craves to just give the game a try.

Just give the game a try. Talk about being naive!

Was it days that I spent looking over everything in that information packet? Was it weeks that I spent trying to decide just which kingdom to play?

Sure, go on. Make fun of me. Laugh at me. I don't care! But, you tell me this - What kind of bastards send you a list of thirty-six different kingdoms, all of which are set in the Age of Conan the Barbarian, that damned Hyborian Age as it eventually became known to me, with text narratives intentionally designed to grab your eye and hold your attention?

That's what RSI did. They used colorful and interesting text to lure me in. What chance did I have? Once I started actually reading what was inside, what they had so cleverly put together and presented as they had, something inside of me then nudged me forward to read that damned rulebook.

But, wait! Did I receive that wall map with all of those kingdoms on it in that first packet of information that they sent to me, or was it in the second one? See how the mind plays tricks on you? See how the memory begins to fade?

None of it matters, though, because once you get hooked, your ass is hooked! Period. End of discussion. Once that happens, you might as well hang it up, because you might just end up as a fan for life, like I did.

But, backing up a bit, let's consider this whole thing, anew.

How - exactly and specifically - does ordinary text transform, first, into a game, and second, into a game that has staying power with your imagination?

It's simple, really, now that I look back on it after all those years and after all of those battles. Did I mention that I drove Clay Fette's Uttara Kuru off land and into the inland sea of Sumero Tso? But, that was in a later game. Not bad for coming into the game as a standby player, after the game had already started. But, I digress.

Let me get back to where I was, back to the beginning. Back to where and how it all began.

In hindsight, I know, now, what I did not know then. Hindsight is twenty-twenty, they say. Who the Hell is they, anyway? Again, I digress.

It's not that text-based games are not boring. Certainly, they can be. Some are. Many are. Maybe even most are.

But, and here's the catch - not all are.

Did you hear that? Do you get what I am saying?

Have you ever read any books, before? What's that, you say? Yeah, I'll even include comic books in that question. I count them as books, too. Whether books or comic books, have you ever read anything, before? Anything, at all??

If you have, then you are probably not just already aware that some books are boring, but you've probably read quite a few of them. Do you give up on all books, just because some are boring?

Not everyone likes the same thing. Not everyone likes the same books. Not everyone likes the same kind of games, either. Is it starting to make sense, now? Are you starting to catch on to what I am

saying?

Once you actually start reading information in start-up packets of PBM games sent to you by play by mail companies, if there's anything at all in what they send to you that is even the least bit interesting, then you tend to just keep on reading. None of it is planned, mind you. You just tend to do what is natural. If it grabs your interest, you tend to just keep on reading.

And, if you keep on reading, then that is how they first hook you.

If you make it through the material in the start-up packet, even if you only read some of it and not all of it, then comes the moment of decision.

Do you actually try to give the game a try?

In other words, do you actually play the game, just to give it a try? It doesn't matter why you do it. It doesn't matter if it was just on a lark, or if you wanted to try it just to give the game a fair chance, or because the art on the front cover of the rulebook, or because you just happen to have liked the map. The thing that matters is, do you take the plunge into what's on the other side of your mailbox? Do you play the game??

I know that Rick Loomis over at Flying Buffalo hates it when I just go on and on about a subject. I'm working on it, Rick. I'm working on it. I really am honest-to-God truthfully trying to cut back. But, I'm not quite finished, here, and there's a lot of people out there who have never played one of these dad-burned play-by-mail things that are wanting to know just exactly what the big deal is with them, anyway.

So, while Rick Loomis practices cutting me some slack, and while I think about cutting back on the length of the articles that I write, let me just say right off that not every PBM game is for everyone.

Now, I probably didn't win any fans with the various PBM companies out there by saying that, but nonetheless, it's the truth. It really is. Go on and ask the PBM companies, if you don't believe me. They can - and likely will - tell you the same thing.

For most people, I suspect that their mailbox is basically just a thing that serves as a bill collection box. The mailman arrives, and drops off all of those bills that you have to pay. It really sucks, huh?

Well, with play by mail gaming, you see, that mailbox of yours that you long ago learned to despise gets repurposed into something that is useful for more than just being a bottomless pit of bills that gobble up all of your money.

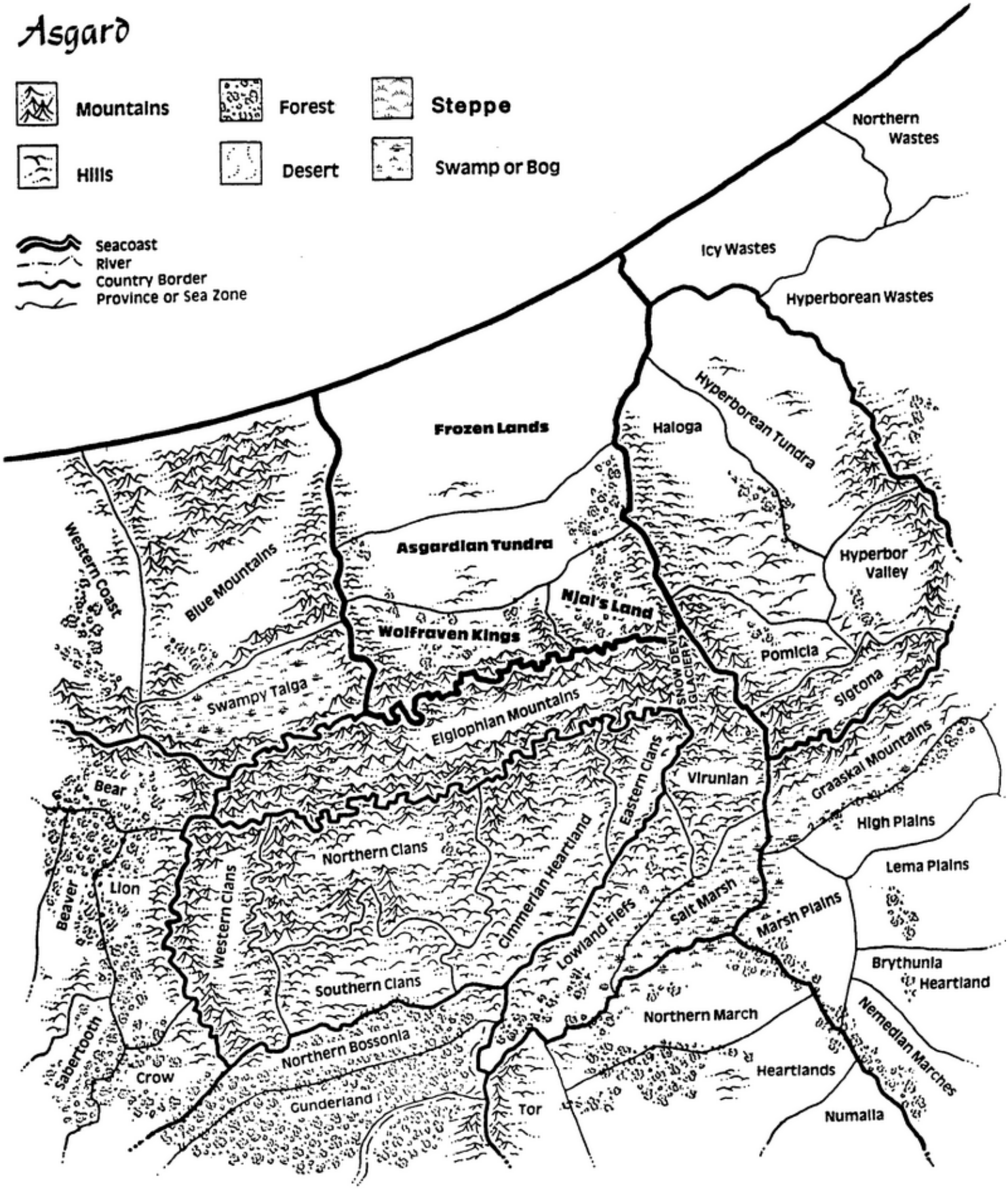
Amazingly enough, your mailbox gets transformed into a way to play games.

And, not just any games, but games with some real depth to them, in many instances. Some of them are easier or quicker to learn than others, and they don't all deal with the same subject matter. But, there does tend to be quite a wide bit of variety, and you can - and often will - end up making quite a few friends, just by playing these types of games.

These days, many of these PBM games, as they call them, can be played online or by e-mail. Not all can, but quite a few can.

They tend to be less time-consuming than Facebook, and just as social, if you bother to communicate with other players who play these games. Don't believe me??

Give them a try. You'll see. I did.



Kingdom of Asgard

Suspense & Decision

Photo Gallery

Our Editor-In-Chief

(God save us all!)

Driving lessons, anyone?

Travel & Adventure!

Go cart drivers, beware!

Something's fishy.

Penguin rescue!

How To Make Players and Influence Friends

Extending a Hand To PBM Noobs

Bernd Jaehnigen

Ever since its heyday in the 1980's, the second biggest problem in Play-By-Mail gaming has been the difficulty in recruiting new players. (The biggest problem is, and always has been, dealing with drop-outs.) All successful games have a core following of devoted players, and we devoted players tend to be more than ready to give back to the community and build the player-base. But since the onslaught of the internet, relentless advances in computer gaming, the addictive lure of MMO games, and the general trend away from complex gaming, our PBM player gene pool has shrunk to perhaps historic lows.

Back in the days of those direct ancestors to PBM -- wargames (Avalon Hill! SPI! Yaquinto!), the player-base was also small. But it was vigorous enough (and compelling enough) to drive early legions of players out to gaming conventions, tournaments, meets, and after-school marathon sessions. There was a large and established publishing base out there, investing in projects both epic and microscopic. Research budgets were significant. Printing costs were high.

People who happened to notice wargames on the shelf of a local toy store, or who were invited for a beer-and-pretzels session of War and Peace came away with a palpable sense that there was some momentum and gravitas behind this hobby. Indeed, it was more like an industry. They knew that if a game did happen to pique their interest, there was a fairly deep well of content to dip into. It didn't seem like a flash in the pan.

Still, the games were often extremely complex -- some with rulebooks thick enough to justify three-ring binders. I have at least two games on my shelf with cardboard counters numbering in the thousands. Playing through a full game could take anywhere from 2 to 100 hours, and that was if you already KNEW how to play. How did they do it? How did they ever manage to lure new players in, given such high barriers to entry?

I myself was drawn in by watching my brother (and soon thereafter a close friend) playing. He had the old classic Luftwaffe spread out on the dining room table. The colorful map, covered with interesting icons and historical names, was accented by this fascinating little counters, each with the silhouette of a plane and representing a flight of bombers or interceptors. The combat charts and production schedules seemed tantalizing. The tension while resolving a turn seemed high -- in a good way. I liked playing chess, but this was like chess on steroids.

Lesson 1: Keep production values high, incorporate excellent imagery wherever possible!

My friend actually got me into some real games, and patiently walked me through the learning process. There were some fits and

starts, but he already had a posse of other pals hanging around his house after school every day. The group involvement further whetted my appetite. Soon I found myself buying my first game at the hobby shop -- Kingmaker, by Avalon Hill. Now a classic.

Lesson 2: Players bringing friends into the arena remains a primary marketing vector!

When Dungeons and Dragons exploded on the scene, role-playing games became our instant favorite. We still played wargames, especially when the game-master was busy with some small group of players and the rest of us had nothing to do. We'd crack open Blue Max or Melee and fight out a few quick duels. As I wrote in an earlier article, we often incorporated elements of role-playing games into our wargaming, and vice versa. We often used the maps of games like Sniper and Squad Leader to play out combat scenes from the first big sci-fi RPG, Traveller.

Lesson 3: Actively encourage and leverage the association with related forms of gaming that might be more popular!

There were some games for which the barriers to entry were just ALWAYS going to be high. I have several games from the monstrous Europa series published by the excellent Game Designers Workshop -- a detailed simulation of every aspect of world war two. The maps of each installment linked up with the others, so that it would be possible to play the entire war, if you happen to have a large empty room in which to leave the map and thousand counters laid out for weeks on end. The rules were detailed and frequently revised. And even though they broke up the invasion of Russia into two games, they were each still such monstrous propositions that I have never ever played that singular pride of my wargame collection -- Fire in the East. Most of the counters remain unpunched.

And yet, I gleefully bought the game many years ago, and am considering buying out the missing titles from the series, even though I have no time or space to play them at the moment. Why? WHY? This part comes down to power gaming, extreme devotion to such exaltation of the hobby, and what an earlier article in S&D called "Boutique" gaming.

Some games, of necessity, can't compromise their design to appeal to a broader base. It would kill the appeal for the dedicated core. In those cases, it is better to double-down on the insanity. Large empires in Hyborian War cost $9/turn! Some Phoenix players budget $30/month or more to sustain their positions! The Cruent Dei rulebook alone costs $25!

This is a good thing. Sometimes, when stores stock their display windows, they put out their high-end goods -- not to tempt penny-pinching buyers into unlikely sales, but to normalize the purchase of lower-end products. "I'm not paying $300 for a pair of shoes, but now that i think of it, I could use a new pair, and they have some on sale for $70..." The mere existence of high-end boutique PBM games makes the value-proposition of paying $2-3/turn for Alamaze much easier to sell.

Lesson 4: Embrace the high-end AND the low-end!

Those old wargames were in many ways the beginning of modern high-intensity gaming, but they formed a stepping stone for role-playing games to form and flourish. Those

role-playing games in turn set the stage for a generation of first-person computer games, MMOs, etc. This ever-larger and more diverse gaming brew made possible the current Big Thing in gaming innovation -- modern euro games and the rest of the advanced boardgame renaissance.

It's an interesting arc. Boardgames (of one sort) leading to a string of developments, resulting in a much larger wave of boardgaming (of a different sort). The same sort of thing is happening with computer games. After Pong, Atari, and Nintendo, there was a wave of high activity in the new computer game industry. This market faded significantly over the last 10 or 15 years as people focused more on console gaming (PlayStation, Xbox, etc) -- to the point that my local GameStop store doesn't carry a single PC game title anymore. But there are new signs of life for the computer as a gaming platform. Not only is the interface of mouse-and-keyboard easier and more flexible than those handheld controllers, but the processing, networking, and community-building possibilities go far beyond consoles.

As PBM games (and PBM-likes) start this new renaissance (and a renaissance it is, as evidenced by this wonderful new magazine!), we can and should extend a hand to newcomers from related markets. I know of several of the most popular boardgames which have been ported over to online play -- mostly through web sites and tablets. These fall so very close to the definition of PBM games that we should invade their communities and hand out free-setup coupons left and right.

Lesson 5: Boardgamers are our first cousins, and present the most fertile ground for planting the seeds of PBM expansion.

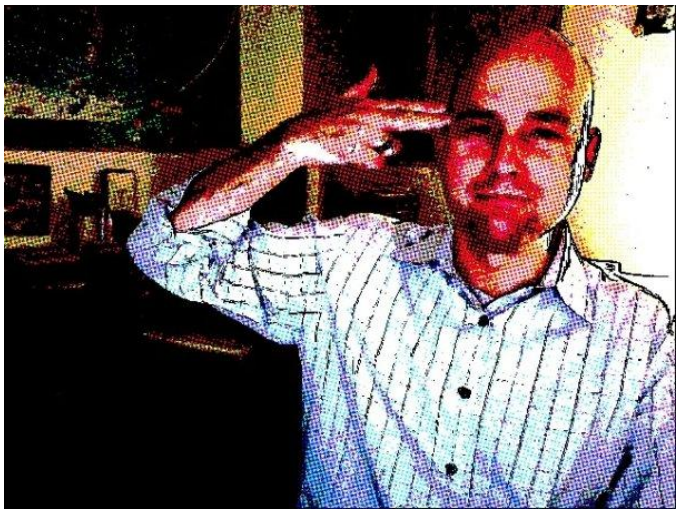
Finally, we as an industry need to look to the examples of computer games and wake up to the possibility that free play could be the best way to start up a new game (and a new player base). I will happily pay $40 for a new computer game I know I will like, but you'd be hard-pressed to pry $5 away from me for a title I know nothing about. With so many options for free entertainment out there, the standard PBM turn fee presents a particularly high barrier to entry. I know that it's easy for me (a player) to make this suggestion -- the professional moderators reading this are unlikely to agree. But, think about it. People who publish free computer games are still making money.

They make entry levels free, with pay-levels available should you be interested. They allow for in-game purchase of advantages easy to do (and there is a long history of pay-for-success in PBM gaming!) And they plaster advertising all over everything. I will give you a kooky example -- my son loves Minecraft, and the makers are profiting nicely (though not excessively). But they have also created an unexpected marketplace for Minecraft ideas. My son has watched at least a hundred different VIDEOS of people playing Minecraft (via YouTube). It is usually some people who play through a particular add-on or adventure server, offering commentary as they play. It's entertaining. Now get this -- some of those videos have over five MILLION views! That is earning their creators thousands of dollars a month. Many of them create Minecraft videos for a living now -- and they charge NOTHING to the end-user.

Lesson 6: Free-to-play must be on the table for all PBM companies.

Perhaps the best way to advance our hobby

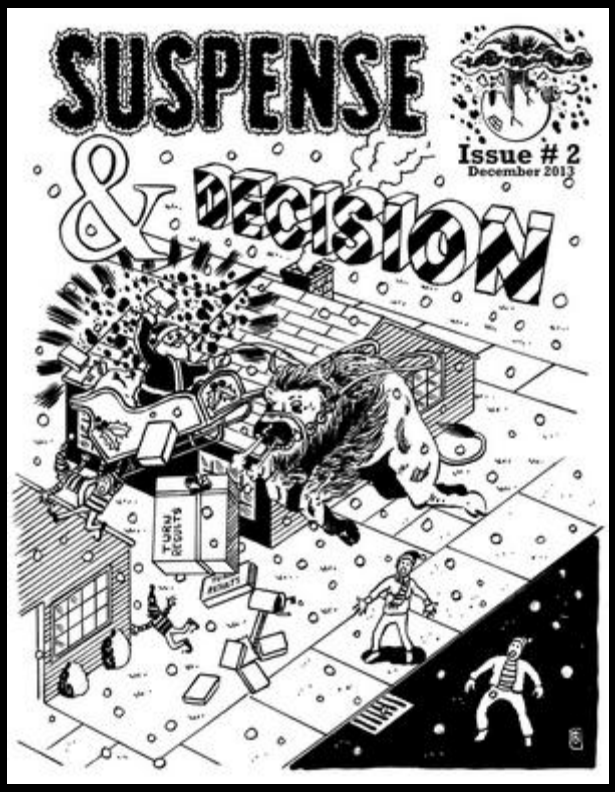
is to print out copies of this magazine (as I have done) and hand them out to your friends at the local game-nights. Before you pick up that six-pack of local brew, print out a few copies and highlight your favorite articles. Maybe even write a few! I have engaged two people in PBM activity in this manner, and hope to get more.



Assistant Editor Bernd Jaehnigen

Bernd Jaehnigen is the newest addition to this magazine's staff, currently filling the role of assistant editor. He is well known to PlayByMail.Net site users by his forum screen name, Ixnay. He is also currently active in numerous games, and is rumored to still be recovering from the loss of his space fleet in a previous game of Far Horizons. He will also unknowingly oversee our magazine's complaint department.

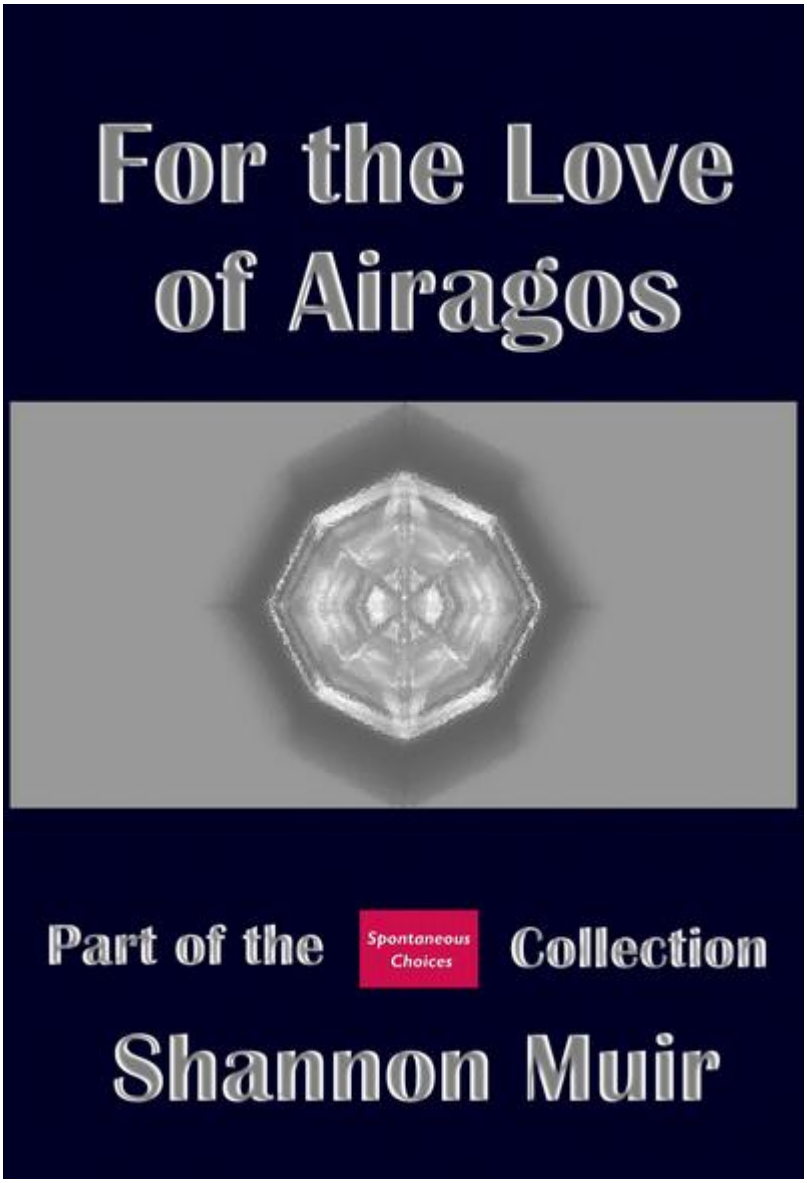
Miss an issue?



Click on the images, above, to download and read!

...FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.

For the Love of Airagos



Heather grew up playing RPGs with her friend Abe and a group of college friends. One day he mysteriously disappeared, but tried to keep the game going as Play By Mail turns - until one day those turns also mysteriously stopped. Years later, she's put in contact with friends old and new who learn they've been pieces in a larger game for a race from another world to come to Earth...

"Yes?" I replied, not sure what he wanted.

"I know it's a long shot, but did you by any chance keep the rulebook that the Dungeon Master wrote for that play by mail game? I can't remember the game flavor."

"It's in my suitcase," I told him. "Not like we can get to it at the moment. I did read it before I came down. Can't think of anything that immediately might help though."

Izzy finally chimed in.

"You want me to go run off and save a fantasy world with you? Are you mad?"

Varderius looked over at Izzy.

"We need you as part of our group," he insisted.

Pick up your copy today!