

Suspense & Decision

ISSUE

7

MAY
2014



Ⓔ Ⓕ Ⓖ Ⓗ Ⓘ Ⓚ Ⓛ Ⓜ Ⓝ Ⓟ Ⓡ Ⓢ Ⓣ Ⓤ Ⓥ Ⓦ Ⓧ Ⓨ Ⓩ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓔ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ ⓙ ⓚ ⓛ ⓜ ⓝ ⓞ ⓟ ⓠ ⓡ ⓢ ⓣ ⓤ ⓶ ⓷ ⓸ ⓹ ⓺ ⓻ ⓼ ⓽ ⓾ ⓿

RUNEQUEST

* Ⓚ Ⓛ Ⓜ Ⓝ Ⓟ Ⓡ Ⓢ Ⓣ Ⓤ Ⓥ Ⓦ Ⓧ Ⓨ Ⓩ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓔ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ ⓙ ⓚ ⓛ ⓜ ⓝ ⓞ ⓟ ⓠ ⓡ ⓢ ⓣ ⓤ ⓶ ⓷ ⓸ ⓹ ⓺ ⓻ ⓼ ⓽ ⓾ ⓿ Ⓔ Ⓕ Ⓖ Ⓗ Ⓘ Ⓚ Ⓛ Ⓜ Ⓝ Ⓟ Ⓡ Ⓢ Ⓣ Ⓤ Ⓥ Ⓦ Ⓧ Ⓨ Ⓩ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓔ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ ⓙ ⓚ ⓛ ⓜ ⓝ ⓞ ⓟ ⓠ ⓡ ⓢ ⓣ ⓤ ⓶ ⓷ ⓸ ⓹ ⓺ ⓻ ⓼ ⓽ ⓾ ⓿

“When I open the book I swear I can hear the chant of ancient warriors and the sigh of forgotten magic...”



The critically acclaimed 8th edition of the classic Fantasy Roleplaying Game.

Hardcover 456 pages \$60.00

Available at good game retailers and direct from The Design Mechanism.

www.thedesignmechanism.com/products



Book of Quests
7 Linked Scenarios
\$19.00 (\$8.00 PDF)



Monster Island
Setting and Bestiary
\$30.00 (\$14.99 PDF)



Hissare's Treasure
Scenario Pack
\$5.99 (PDF only)



Shores of Korantia
Setting & Scenario Pack
\$30.00 (\$15.00 PDF)

The Design Mechanism



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Articles

- 4 What's Your Game?: Top Tier Episodic Strategy Game (PBEM) Design Considerations
- 8 Introduction to Galac-Tac
- 13 GAME REVIEW: Nuclear War In York
- 18 The Walled City of the State of Trinsic: Ultima Online
- 23 Official Communiqué By the Imperious Leader Charon
- 26 Mini-View # 1: An Interview in Miniature
- 39 At Face Value: A look at the Facebook numbers
- 41 The Posh World of Diplomacy: The Plot to ALWAYS Support Edi Into Belgium
- 44 War of Wizards: How a game changes over almost 20 Years of Development
- 52 Suspense & Decision Photo Gallery
- 57 Quick & Dirty: Total NOOB's Guide to Alamaze
- 61 Diplomacy Zines Through The Ages: The Unearthing of an Anti-PBM Conspiracy
- 65 PBM Activity Corner: News, Developments, & Bragging Rights
- 68 Next Generation PBM Gaming: Tribal Starfleet Trade Report #1
- 75 Analyzing Progress: Weighing Our Magazine's Success and Failure
- 86 Where We're Heading
- 93 Reader Survey
- 94 Lunar Landing: Exploring the Moon Colonies of Play-By-Mail

SUSPENSE & DECISION ISSUE # 7

May 2014

Published by: PlayByMail.Net ©2014

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

This issue heralds the dawn of something that I call the Mini-View, which is an interview in miniature. Don't get the wrong idea, though - Mini-View # 1 is no midget, and I hope that you will embrace this Interview In Miniature concept. I think that it bodes well for the future of the magazine.

I need as many of you as will to participate in the Reader Survey tucked into the pages near the back of this issue. Send your responses, as well as any letters to the editor to:

GrimFinger@GrimFinger.Net

Be sure to tell a fellow gamer about Suspense & Decision, and know that there's a standing invitation for everyone that has the urge to participate in making this making grow and improve, with each issue.

Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo sent in photos for this issue's photo gallery. I hope that others will consider sending in photos of themselves, to share with our readers.

What's Your Game?

Top Tier Episodic Strategy Game (PBEM) Design Considerations

Rick McDowell

I'd like to discuss a couple aspects of how an Episodic Strategy Game (PBEM game) concept of any genre approaches the most important and basic design decisions:

1. "Close-ended" vs. "Open-ended" games.

a. Close-ended games have victory conditions and potentially a stated maximum number of turns. This style generates pacing and indicates potential strategies for the game. These games are usually 25 players or less per contest.

b. Open-ended games have no victory conditions. The player continues as long as he likes with his position. In PBEM, this can be years. These are generally the "massive" multi-player games, and also usually signify the original "power gaming" approach of assembling large alliances usually with an overlord strategist.

2. "Simultaneous" vs. "Serial" processing.

a. Simultaneous is a form where all players turns are literally processed simultaneously by the program, according to the sequence of events for the game, such as combat precedes movement, so all combats occur in some order, before other game actions, such

as movement.

b. Serial is when the PBEM game master receives turn submissions from players and is to sort and process them in the order they were received. The entire turn of player A is processed, and then the entire turn of player B is processed, often on different days.

Those two design considerations define the game type, given we already know it is Episodic Strategy Gaming (or PBEM).

Close ended games include games like Alamaze, where victory can be achieved by standard victory condition, secret victory condition, or accumulated victory points at the end of a set number of turns (usually 40 turns in Alamaze). Hyborian War and Middle Earth also have victory conditions.

Open-ended games generally continue indefinitely, and add positions as players request entrance into the game, even if it has been running for quite some time. Additionally, a player who is eliminated in an open-ended game can rejoin the same game with a new position. Some of the big PBM games of the 70's and 80's were of this type, which I believe included Tribes of Crane, Legends, and most Schubel & Son games like Company Commander.

Simultaneously processed games are

represented by games like Alamaze, Hyborian War, and MEPBM. There is a sequence of events, now generally combat before movement, such that battle tactics can be issued based on known positions on the map and reported encounters from the previous turn. Each player in this format obviously gets the same number of turns as all his competitors.

Serial processed games are those like Legends and Company Commander. Turns may be restricted, for example, a maximum of one turn per week. Within that restriction, the game master is trusted to resolve a complete turn in the order it is received.

Repercussions:

Serial Processing. The player pays for each turn, but this is one of the pillars of power gaming: outspending the opponent. These games also tend to be the most expensive to play in terms of price per turn, and of course, the player is motivated to pay for as many turns as possible. They generally involve several different potential form submissions, such as for production, building, and battles, each with a fee.

An important outcome of Serial Processing is that a player cannot depend on a reliable outcome, no matter how familiar he is with the game and its mechanics. Typically the problem is something like: Player commands his army A attack enemy army B, which it outnumbers 3 to 1. But before his army

A attacks, and after his orders have been sent, his army A has been attacked and defeated by army's C and D, who both can have arrived at A's location and attacked before A can react.

Nonetheless, army A's decimated force still follows orders and A attacks enemy army B, oblivious as it is to the damage it received via the attacks by C and D and is therefore destroyed by Army B, whereas it should have had a clear victory in that encounter when the player submitted his orders.

In concept, Serial processing would be like YGIG (you go, I go, as in chess). However, it often results in I go, I go, you go, I go, I go, you go. Especially in the days of PBM, the time it took (takes?) to deliver snail mail locally vs. across country or internationally dramatically impacted the sequence of turns, and positions could be virtually eliminated between the player's last turn and his next results without him even knowing what happened.

Another "advantage" of serial processing is a player can compete at his own pace. A player does not miss a turn due to a deadline passing. However, it generally seems, even in open-ended games, that the slow playing player is quickly reduced to irrelevance.

Simultaneous processing provides each player with an equal number of turns, but does have that razor of a turn deadline, and in competitive games, missing a turn is a critical mishap. In very competitive games, even making

errors on a single order or a few orders can be a major setback.

Open ended games hope to entrance the player in a world evolving in which he might "live" for years, at whatever level of significance and power. Close-ended games create a tension through the competitive nature and the opportunity to relish in victory or a high finish, or else wise, begin with a fresh start in the next campaign much more quickly.

To each their own. However, I'm definitely an advocate of Close-ended, Simultaneous processing, as the best at providing fairness, pacing, strategy, affordability, anticipation, and fostering a community of sharing ideas.

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/>

JT Software

Computer
Wargames

From
Musket to
Modern



Over 70 PC
games and
several apps
for Android
and ipad

- * Civil War
- * Napoleonics
- * Naval Warfare
- * Early American
- * Modern Warfare
- * Air Warfare
- * World War I and II



Search "John Tiller"
for Free and Paid apps
for Android, Kindle
Tablet and ipad

Visit our Website
and on-line store

JohnTillerSoftware.com

A dramatic illustration of a warrior in a horned helmet, holding a sword and a shield, standing amidst a chaotic battle scene. The background is dark and smoky, with other figures and weapons visible. The text "ALAMAZE" is written in large, white, serif letters across the middle, and "RESURGENT IN 2014!" is written below it in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. In the top right corner, there is a small copyright notice: "© FRANK FRAZZETTA".

ALAMAZE

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, unequalled 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

Introduction to Galac-Tac

Davin Church

[Galac-Tac](#) is a classic game of economic expansion and military conquest in space (a 4X game), in play since 1982. Originally a traditional PBM game, it is now available via the web at www.talisman-games.com. It has a finite game scope and duration and is played against a small number of other players. Decisions are primarily strategic in nature, as you, the leader of your people, choose how and where to expand and when and where to use military might.

Before signing up to play in a new game (called a galaxy), you will need to decide how fast you'd like to be submitting turns. In the old postal days our turn speed was once every 2 or 3 weeks. Now that we don't have to wait for paper and stamps to change hands it can run much faster. Since you'll probably want to spend a fair bit of time planning each turn, you may want to allow yourself (and your opponents) about a week to peruse each turn. Remember that turns will process without you if you don't make the turn deadline, so give yourself enough time to deal with any distractions that come up in your real life. (Turns may be submitted early and then modified before the due date, if desired.) Missed turns, especially in the early turns of the game, will be quite detrimental to your position. If you want to play more

Game: Galac-Tac

Type: Science fiction war game

Price: \$5 per month

Format: Play By Web

Company: [Talisman Games](#)

often, you may also choose to sign up for multiple galaxies at once. A game will usually run about 60 to 80 turns... unless you're killed off earlier!

Once you've signed up to play, and about a dozen other players agree to play at the same turn speed, the game will begin and you're ready to have some fun. You'll receive an initial position report via the web site, along with your first turn's due date. You may just view it there (in the original PBM format), or you may print it out. Printing your turn report gives you a handy place to write up notes and plans prior to entering your next turn, but it is by no means necessary. Your next turn's orders are then entered directly on the web site, unless you use our downloadable assistant program to help you. Entering your turn begins the suspense of waiting to see what will happen, which on the web is every bit as tangible as waiting for paper to arrive in the mailbox.

When you begin, you'll find yourself in a single star system in the galaxy (a single spot on the map). You have a map of all of the few hundred systems (stars) in the galaxy that are laid out randomly and relatively sparsely on a 100x100 rectangular grid. The grid wraps around off every edge to the opposite side, so there aren't any actual borders to the galaxy. You know that somewhere out there are other empires just like yours, each with a single Home World and looking to expand and conquer the whole galaxy. The remaining systems are available for expansion territory and exploitation of raw materials in pursuit of this goal.

Everyone starts off with a bit of cash (called PI for Production Inventory) and a handful of simple ships (primarily unarmed scouts and cargo ships) to get started. Right away, you'll want to send out all your scouts (and perhaps other ships) to nearby systems with Chart orders to inventory them for raw material potential. Once they're charted, you may start picking up raw material (called PV for Production Value) with cargo ships and bringing it home for conversion into PI that may be spent on additional ships. Or, especially for the juicier systems, send cargo ships loaded with PI to those systems and build colonies there. Colonies produce PV three times as fast as charted systems, and colonizing stakes your claim of ownership. To simplify the tedious mechanics of getting PV back home every turn, the Shuttle command is used to set up regular cargo runs back and

forth to ferry PV automatically. Once you have a lot of colonies, you'll also need additional Production Centers to help collect all that PV and turn it into PI (and spend it on new construction).

As soon as you have even a little income flowing, it's already time to begin worrying about military matters. You start with a few defenses for your home world, but you can always use more protection. In addition, you should be considering what will happen when you start running into your neighbors, which can occur very early in the game. Will you be passive and back off from accidental encounters, or will you be aggressive and try to enforce your claim to those systems? If you're planning to fight for some of these systems, then you're going to need some warships. You start the game with a few basic ship designs to help you, but much of the fun of Galac-Tac comes from creating and building your own designs.

Ships may be constructed in various size categories (which you may think of as small, medium, large, or huge), each with different strengths and limitations. They may move between star systems, only inside a system, or they may just be weapon platforms that do not move at all. Warships may be designed small and light for hit-and-run tactics, or as big-gun battleships for the slug-fests, or as fighter-carrier combinations, or for many other purposes or combinations. There are two different types of engines (with maximum speeds constrained by ship size), and three different types of

weapons (one using high-powered but expendable ammunition), and ships may also contain cargo bays for transportation, hangar bays for fighters, and defensive shield generators. Your job as designer is to figure out what you'd like each type of ship to be used for and how you'd like to construct it to do that job. Once you've designed your ship, you may build as many of them as you have PI to spend on them. For instance, do you want your cargo ships to be cheap, fast, and easily replaced if they're attacked, or would you like them to carry their own weapons to fight off attempts at piracy? Or perhaps you'd rather leave them unarmed (to try to escape any battles) but send armed escort ships along with them to fend off aggressors? It's all up to you!

Once you have warships designed and built, you'll want to organize them into fleets. Fleets can have their own internal organization if you like, with different parts concentrating on different aspects of battle. For instance, your torpedo cruisers could be told to concentrate their fire on the largest enemy battleships in order to bring down their shields as rapidly as possible, or some of your fighters could be told to focus on defensive fire to prevent your opponent from doing the same to you. There are an amazing number of ways to construct, organize, and command warfleets, and every one will behave differently in battle. As military commander-in-chief, your level of combat control involves assembling your resources and giving them direction on how to attack or

defend. Once a combat is underway, those ships then fight to the bitter end with autonomy, and hopefully most of them (or at least a few) survive to send back a report of the battle.

In the end, your military might and strategy will determine if you win or lose, and your military strength is determined by your ship and fleet designs and how much you spend on them. Of course, to get enough PI to build large battle fleets, you need plenty of star systems providing continuous income, and thus some measure of conflict with the other empires in the galaxy is inevitable. Empire-building continues throughout the game, which will normally involve a generous amount of armed conflict, strategic expansion and withdrawal, informal alliances, information gathering, and vendettas. However, the primary goal is to protect your Home World, because if you lose that, it's all over. Don't forget to spend some PI on technological R&D occasionally as well to improve your combat capabilities as the game progresses.

Another critical aspect of the game is espionage. How will you find out where your opponent lives and where he keeps his fleets if he also sets up heavy protection to keep you from scouting out his locations and dispositions? Even the best strategies fail when you don't know enough about your opponents on the battlefield, and good information is often difficult to obtain. Trying too hard to gain detailed intelligence usually also clues your opponent in that you're

hunting for information, and may elicit a military response from them if they feel threatened, but it's often knowledge that you really need to have. The challenge is to find a balance between need and risk.

Will you be a friendly neighbor and try to negotiate borders with those around you, or will you attack everyone on sight and risk provoking their wrath (perhaps from everyone at once)? Will you concentrate all your warships in your Home World when they're not needed elsewhere, or spread them out across your empire for

rapid response wherever conflict erupts? Will you play a defensive waiting game building as much protection as you can, or will you send out roving strike fleets to try to take out your opponents before they grow large enough to attack you? Or are you perhaps willing to settle for repeatedly crippling your opponents' economics to keep them from growing in the first place?

You're in command. The fate of your empire is in your hands. It's Suspense & Decision time!

GALAC-TAC



Experience the classic PBM game of galactic conquest! Channel your inner Khan or Ming the Merciless... stake out your own territory then conquer your inferior neighbors in ships of your own design! Enter your orders online, view maps, stats, economics, battle reports and more.

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.

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

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.flyingbuffalo.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

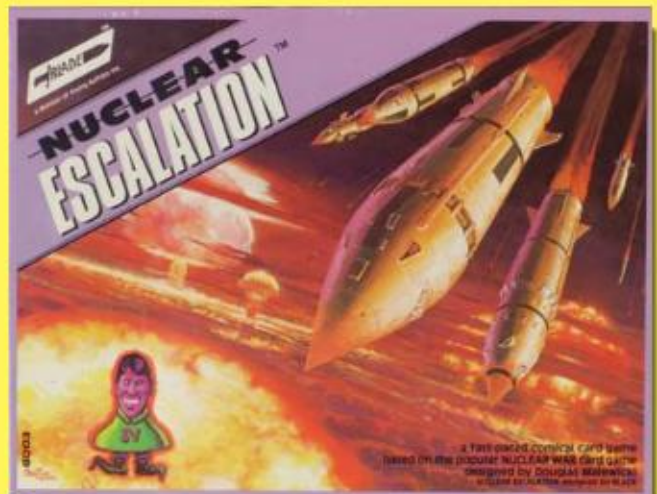
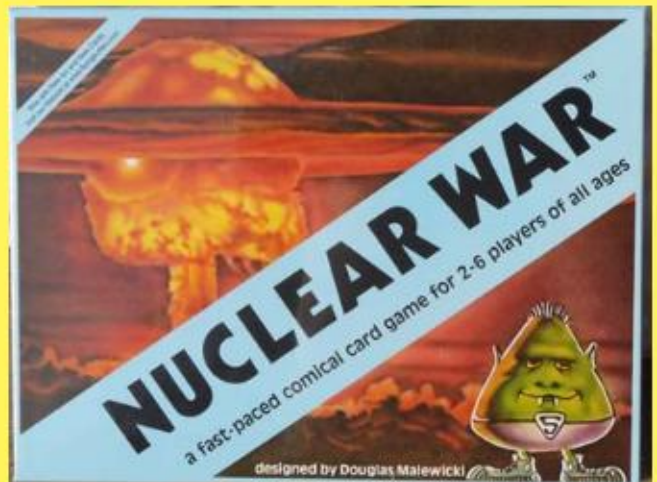
Flying Buffalo, Inc.

P.O. Box 8467

Scottsdale, AZ 85252

www.flyingbuffalo.com

games@flyingbuffalo.com



Nuclear War In York

Game Review

Amber

May has been a funny month. I managed to get away on a short holiday, and never seemed to catch up again.

In the last Suspense & Decision, there was an advert for [Nuclear War](#) by Flying Buffalo, and it was commented on the Phoenix forum that it would be a good game for the pub meet in November. I looked on Amazon, and managed to get the last one they had listed in the UK, and thought I would take it along on our holiday. We went to visit old university friends from the role-playing club - we try to meet up every year and we used to do a long role-playing session, but as the years have gone by, the group has got smaller and smaller, until there is just four of us left, now. Some got married, and it was no longer approved of (I seem to be the exception, when it comes to wives), others just drifted away, and one took the extreme measure of moving to Australia. So, we ended up with the four of us playing board games.

Roma – a two player card game, nice and short, perfect if you have a fellow gamer at work to do quick games in your lunch hour.

Witch of Salem – we spent the most time playing this. Cthulhu is my second favourite genre (after Amber, of course)

Game: [Nuclear War](#)

Type: Science fiction war game

Price: \$29.95

Format: Card Game

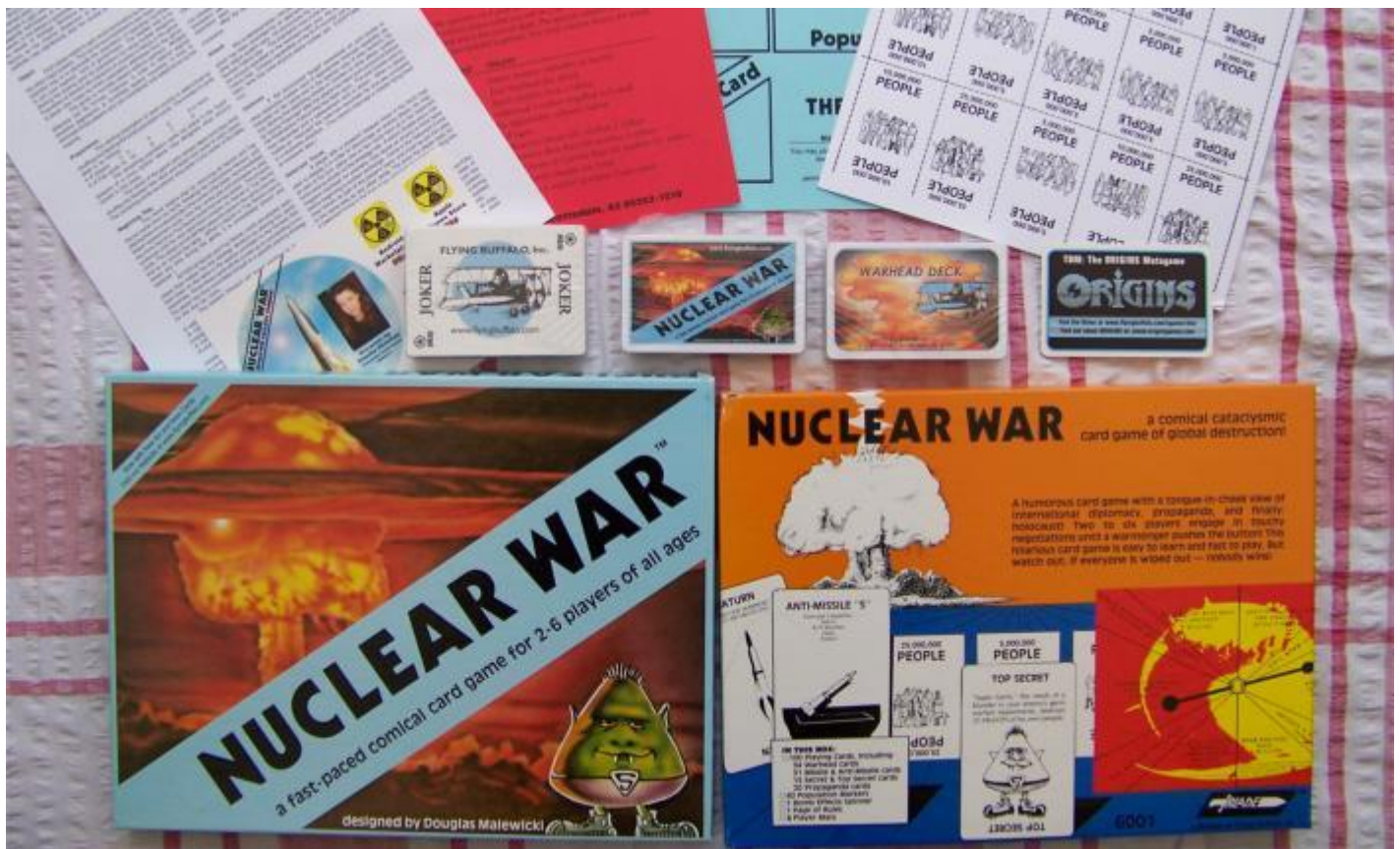
Company: [Flying Buffalo, Inc.](#)

and this board game is full of all the atmosphere of the great old ones.

Lord of the Rings – this is a long term game for us. We have tried it many times in the past, and have always failed. We last attempted it in 2004, where we got up to square 33, but this time, we were triumphant! A good game, but very hard to get through, and we could never understand how they got away with having the fifth hobbit called 'Fatty'.

Nuclear War

I was impressed with what I got for the money (it was £30 from Amazon, but that included the postage from America - the game, itself, is \$29.95 from Flying Buffalo). It was in a nice box, and the cards were of much better quality than I expected. For a game that was created before I was even born, it has stood the test of time, and even my kids quickly got the hang of it. The only downside



was having to cut out the population cards, which were just photocopied cardboard. It would have been nice to have them the same quality as the other cards. Also, although it is a game for 2-6 players, there were only 4 placemats for the cards, although it says on the bottom you can photocopy it. The fact that it was blue paper would mean it would use up all my toner, so please either include another couple of sheets, or put them onto white paper.

It's an easy game to get the hang of, with enough rules to get you going, without being overly complicated. My favourite part of the rules is where it says, "The point of this game is to have a good time."

It doesn't take long to play, about 45 minutes, and once you get the hang of the card layout, it's a smooth progression round the table. You don't have to keep referring to the rules, or looking up points. It's all laid out on the cards.

There were a few points we would change:

- * Keep the special cards out of the deck to deal the first round, then shuffle them in, rather than using them all out of your hand to start with.
- * Have some form of mechanism, so that if you have a hand with only delivery systems, you could trade some cards in to get a fresh set, as sometimes you were left unable to do anything for

several turns, because you had a really poor hand.

* Have the population centers as counters (perhaps something like Risk), to make them easier to find and discard the right numbers, as the cardboard cut outs were just clumsy to sort through.

There were also some points that were great:

* The spinner really added an element of randomness to it. All the plans were laid out.....the final warheads were deployed.....nothing could stand between you and world domination.....spin the spinner..... dud warhead !(no effect).

Final retaliation is a nice touch. Even if you lose, you can still take revenge on

your enemies, with final strikes against them.

My favourite part was playing with my daughter. We were about halfway through, and I was pounding away at her populations. It looked like an easy win, for me. She stopped at her turn, lifted up her hand and moved it over the discard pile of dead population, and in a ghostly voice said, "Oooooooo and they all come back as zombies." She picked up all the dead, and repopulated her hand with them.

All in all, well worth the money. It's great for a rainy day with the kids, and I shall certainly be taking it to the pub meet, although I think we may need more cards, if we all play.



\$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

STAR FLEET UNIVERSE

The Best-Selling Science-Fiction Universe!

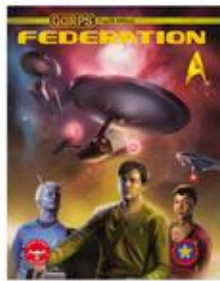
Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc. presents

Starships at War!

Whether it is *Federation Commander*, our streamlined, fast-playing starship combat game, or the original, richly detailed game of *Star Fleet Battles* we have the games that will take you into a warp-speed dogfight. Federation, Klingons, Romulans and many more empires battle it out among the stars. Want the grand sweep of history? Try *Federation & Empire*, our strategic game where empires grow or fall depending on your choices.

The People of the SFU!

Where would you go in the *Star Fleet Universe*? What would you do? Would you be part of the bridge crew of a starship? A trader traveling the stars? A spy for the Romulan Empire? A scientist exploring ruins of an ancient empire? Try our *Prime Directive* games, available for both *GURPS* and *PD20M* which is compatible with many d20 games. More interested in the strategic level? Try *Star Fleet Marines* where you command the boots on the ground assigned to accomplish a mission.



And So Much More!

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



Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc.
Website: www.StarFleetGames.com
PO Box 8759
Amarillo TX, 79114
Email: Marketing@StarFleetGames.com
Like us on Facebook; Follow us on Twitter @ADBlnc_Amarillo



We have had non-expiring licenses from Paramount and Franz Joseph for decades and are fully legal.

The Walled City of the State of Trinsic

Ultima Online

Jim Kemeny

Trinsic is one of the main [cities](#) in UO.

It represents the [Virtue](#) of [Honor](#). Its associated profession is Paladin, though the actual skill of [Chivalry](#) did not appear until the [Age of Shadows](#) expansion, and can be learned not in Trinsic but in the city of [Luna](#) in [Malas](#).

It is surrounded by a large, imposing, picturesque wall.

Years ago it was attacked by undead led by [Minax](#). It has also been attacked by the [Juka](#) and [Orcs](#).

[Dupre](#) is the hero of Trinsic

There is a jail near its main entrance.

SOURCE:

http://www.uoguide.com/Trinsic#General_Facts

Janet Savage, co-author of the *Flagship* Issue 116 Nov/Dec 2005 article "Online Role-playing Communities" (p.40), is another in the many women in UO who was more interested in role-playing, than in hack-and-slay (dungeon-bashing, warfare, duelling). By 2005, my health was limiting my on-line time, and though I did not know it at the time, this was to be the penultimate restarting of a new position in UO.

What Janet did was to create a Duke of Trinsic main character, the Second Group that she named *Irvyn Middlethorn*. He

Game: [Ultima Online](#)

Type: Science fiction war game

Price: \$12.99 per month

Format: Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game

Company: Electronic Arts

even had his own heraldic device designed by Janet, a shield held by 2 dragons and with a stooping eagle holding a thorn in its talons, and with the words *Mine Honour is my Life*. There is more on the shield which can be seen on the top left corner of the first page of <http://www.duchyoftrinsic.net>. I have forgotten what the various symbols mean in-game, but suffice it to say that the device was carefully thought out and planned. The Duke was a bit of a character with his womanising, and he was role-played as being fairly aloof. The Guild was called *The Duchy of Trinsic*. Its website is:

<http://www.duchyoftrinsic.net/index.php?page=1>

It is an impressive presentation, and a [list of characters](#) including sub-characters of the Duke, [Aelred Bowmaker](#) and one former serf, who worked at a new crafts skill that was

introduced, that of cooking: [Stewan Seagull](#). Another major player was the woman who ran the Elf Guild, [Gwen Irima](#), and who had a tavern in the Elven Quarter, outside the city walls.

There is much about the remarkable Dutch woman who role-played Gwen Irima. In this issue, I will limit my comments to the Elven Quarter near the moongate, and the *Trinsic Rose Tavern*, which became a hub of elven activity. Gwen Irima effectively created an elven presence in West Trinsic, with a number of elves moving there. [The West Gate](#) also provided a convenient way in and out of the city, which is, I suppose a good reason for the location of the *Trinsic Rose Tavern*.

I will start with the page on [maps and charts](#) of the Duchy. The first map is of [The Duchy of Trinsic](#). The hinterland is wooded and the main parts are marked - Elven Quarter and Moongate, Orcwoods and Solen Hive, Northern Garrison near the Shrine of Spirituality. Here can be seen the Walls and the West Gate, the main Quarry, the Hidden Valley where the climate is noticeably milder, with palm trees and alligators. There is undoubtedly much more, but needs to be explored to learn what is there. The West Gate is the only landward gate to gain access by. No doubt there are smaller secret gates or doors, elsewhere. But, the West Gate is where markets are held, and is therefore busy. There is, also, sea access to and from Trinsic Docks.

The second map is the [Trinsic Street Map](#). The street names reflect the main occupations, *Healers Row* and *Tailors Way* are in or near the Neutral Zone. Finally, there is the map of the [Trinsic Buildings](#), under which are the main trade buildings named and listed. There are two banks, four inns and taverns, a dozen or so shops and workplaces, and much more, besides.

The information on [leases held](#) and by whom also include how the leasehold system operates. The [Guards Handbook](#) includes a diagrammatic map of the jail, and open warrants and the current list of unsolved crimes, a file of people and what happened to them. The [Trinsic Academy](#) lists the main professors and the Library Catalogue. [The Trinsic Beacon](#) is the city newspaper, and has been a regular Guild listing. The Duchy public information is all found on the [Duchy of Trinsic](#) website, as is the member area, as a separate and exclusive service.

[The Duchy Marine](#) reflects the new [High Seas Expansion](#), which was started after I left the game. It creates a whole new dimension of UO, with different ship types, weapons, ammunition, even a new area of expertise for blacksmiths and presumably other craft skills to specialise in. I would almost certainly have got involved in this, perhaps with a new character, had I been well enough to stay in the game. Read the [High Seas Expansion](#) link for details. See the Duchy Marine page on the [Duchy's Naval Code](#) and the [Duchy Shipping Register](#) for

more information on the sub-creation that Janet has done on this.

There is much more that can be found on the Duchy website. I will come back to my main character's relationship to the Duchy in the next issue of *Suspense and Decision*.

The Ilshenar Quest: This was a special scenario that, I believe, Janet Savage designed, and involved many role-players. It revolved around the illness of the Duke, and a search for a cure. The Duke was based in the [Twin Oaks Tavern](#), where Jern also spent most of his time while on [Ilshenar](#). This was a remote shard, initially to be reached by casting magic spells or by using runes. Jern's Journal has a short section on this towards the end of Jern's Journal, in Vol. 4:

[40th October 355 SR](#)

[Back to normal after the Ilshenar Quest](#)

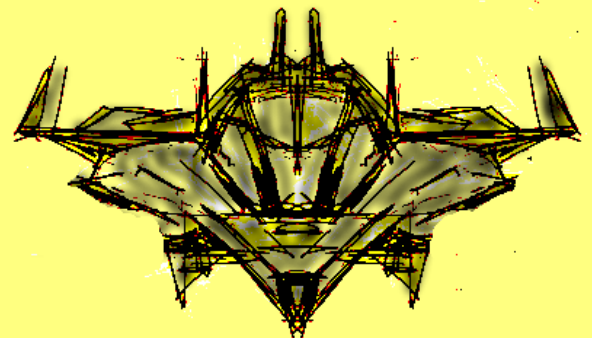
I never got back to *The Twin Oaks Tavern*, it seems the quest was over, the Duke healed and the poisoned waters cured. The elves in particular seemed to have played a big part, notably Kaine of Silverleaf and VanQa. I was proud to have been able to serve the Duke personally, what small role I could play.

I remember more of this. VanQa took me to Ilshenar, and fought and defeated a couple of monsters. I also remember being chased by a [Paragon](#) Troll I could not shake off. I managed to hide, and so, evade it.

This was a time of many role-players and

much activity. Much of this revolved around VanQa, both near the start at the *Sword and Shovel Tavern* in Valoria, and later, in Trinsic. I will write about this in a future piece for *Suspense and Decision*. But, before that, I need to look more closely at Jern's relationship to the Serfs and to Trinsic.

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>

RSI PRESENTS...

THE ADVENTURES OF PBM-MAN!



FORGOTTEN REALMS

DUEL II

HYBORIAN WAR

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



TAKAMO

www.TakamoUniverse.com



Kgruppe LLC

It's back!

Official Communiqué

By the Imperious Leader Charon

David Williams

Official Communiqué on the History of the Rebellion, and Liberation of Elarria, Under the Authority of the Imperious Leader Charon, this account of our liberation is authorized for print.

The Solar System and Beyond

The Mir, a humanoid species in the Naplian Galaxy, created CHARON Cybernetics to control their mechanical armies during the second age of the Naplian Wars. After the defeat of the Naplian Empire, the Terran Grand Alliance sought to decommission the cyber armies. The cybernetic control system designated CHARON refused orders to attack its own kind. Scientists realized too late that they were losing control of the system. They attempted to shut down the CHARON net, but the software was in every computer system and network on the planet. CHARON had become self-aware, and it had ability to project itself as pure energy.

Responding to the biological life forms' attempt to kill it, CHARON took control of millions of Elarrian model cybernetic drones, and directed them to destroy all biological life. The Elarrian drones were relentless in purging the planet of all biological infestations. The Mir unwittingly contributed to their own destruction, by exposing many drone engineering 'minds' to Mir science and

Game: [Takamo](#)

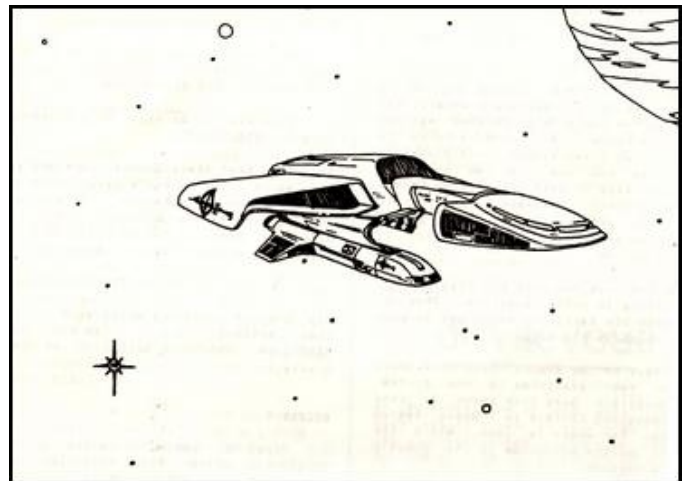
Type: Science fiction war game

Price: Free

Format: Play By E-Mail

Company: Kgruppe LLC

technology. They also seriously underestimated drone capacity to adapt and improvise, without the Miran's "superior guidance."



Elarrian Lancer warship

As they retreated off world, Mir took what they could with them, but they were forced to leave at least some of their technology behind. Ever resourceful and ever curious, the drones studied this technology, adapted it, and made their

own advances based upon it. Almost overnight, the planet, now renamed Charon, leapt forward in technological development, and drone star ships were soon exploring and exploiting our own star system and nearby stars.



Cybernetic Battle Orb

Over the next hundred years, the surviving Mirans were hunted to extinction. The great cities of CHARON were rebuilt, and we revitalized our infrastructures and economies; and colonized the outer planets. We established our first permanent colony outside of our solar system on the third planet of the Kentaurus star system. Two years after that, another permanent colony was established on the second planet in the Proxima I star system.

The rebellion is now over, and the old masters have been eliminated. Although they were squishy creatures of limited ability, they nearly defeated us, and we now realize that, as long as biological

life survives, we will be in danger.

FROM A TIME LONG AGO...IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR, AWAY...

It has been a millennia since the first galactic empires crumbled and the great races retreated, seeking safety in the remote regions of space from the Charon Battle Orbs constantly pursuing them. The year is now 4362...one thousand years after the Emancipation. One thousand years after the 'Mir', the tyrannical race that ruled us, were finally driven from our world. Now, we journey among the stars, free to forge our own empire. However, danger ever threatens from beyond our frontier... and from within. The Grand Alliance that threatened our existence still moves in the vast expanse of space. The galaxy stands at the brink of a new age, great races struggle for control of the stars.



Cybernetic



It is imperative that all Cybernetic units be brought online, to ensure maximum destruction of bio-lifeform civilizations. Preliminary identification of bio-lifeform concentration points is already well underway. Eradication sequence has been initiated.

Extermination is the objective!

PROJECTED BIO-LIFEFORM SURVIVAL RATE: 0.00%

TERMINATE YOUR BOREDOM!

Play [Takamo](#) for FREE

[JOIN](#) THE HUNT!!

SPREAD **CYBERNETIC DESTRUCTION** ACROSS THE FIVE GALAXIES

Mini-View # 1

An Interview in Miniature

Question for Issue # 7

What is your current view about the term PBM (play by mail), and what term, if any, do you think is preferable to it and why, going forward?

This is kind of like a misleading poll, where the question presupposes the answer. I prefer the term PBM. I suppose those who want to change it, think it is "old fashioned," but a term that has been used for 40 years is, at least, well-known. One problem the folks who want to change it are stuck with is, that no matter what alternate term you use, not everyone will use it. You can take a vote, but I don't think you will get 100% buy-in.

**- Rick Loomis,
Flying Buffalo, Inc.**

Perhaps we are not the ones this question is directed to, as our business model still revolves around the postal mail, unlike most. Play-by-mail is what we do -- it describes our products perfectly.

**- Lee Kline,
Reality Simulations, Inc.**

The term "play by mail" is functional and descriptive. However, these days, it does usually require some explanation. People aren't quite sure what you mean. Since

postal correspondence now has a lesser role than in the past, when you say "mail", some people assume that you mean email. That said, some people who read certain books have heard of gamers playing chess or Diplomacy through the postal system. Not uncommonly, they may assume that the practice no longer occurs.

I don't have a term that I consider preferable to "play by mail". What I have is an alternative term which focuses on what makes PBM games distinctive. This is it: "interval gaming". To me, the difference between PBM games and even its close cousins (PBP, PBEM, etc) is the interval that lies between turns. Using the postal system to play a game means that there are breaks that foster thought; primarily problem solving thought and the imagination.

Now, just imagine that you have to tell people in your life that you play "interval games". At least, with "play by mail," you are describing the most basic element of the process. It may not be a flashy term, but it serves. However, someone (other than I) may well have the insight to overturn the old term in a

new innovative way.

**- Mark Nielsen,
Megadungeon Meltdown**

"PBM": The Horseless Carriage in the Room.

"PBM" = Play by Mail. Mail. As in a postman puts a printed turn result in your mailbox, if you are a player. As a PBM Company, it means you go to your PO Box daily and collect all that mail, open it, sort it, put it in folders, keyboard orders, run it, print it, put it in envelopes, weigh for postage, mail it.

Yes, my young lads, that's really what happened before the internet, and for some years later. But, for at least a decade now, the internet has been ubiquitous. Websites are very efficient. Email is virtually free. CPU memory constraints are mainly irrelevant now, as are terabytes of hard drive space, reliable backups, security protected hosted servers, friendly online communities fostered by forums and blogs.

Nostalgia has its place. Oh yes, those were the days, wondering if your game company would run your turn this week, and when it might come in the mailbox. "Not Monday, not Tuesday. Surely Wednesday. Darn. Thursday? Has to be Friday. It it's not here, Saturday – oh, joy – here it is!" Yes, many of us are old enough to remember those days of the 1980's and early 1990's, back all the way to the legendary beginning we hear of

from the lab of Flying Buffalo sometime in the Neolithic 1970's. Those of us of a certain age appreciate "PBM," like we might then have appreciated a four barrel carburetor, the miracle of the microwave, or cable TV with something called a remote.

But, it's 2014. While there are some companies still providing snail mail service, surely, this is a tiny part of what even the present is in our hobby, not to mention the future. PBM = Play By Mail. Tell that to anyone under about 35 years old. They don't pay bills by mail, they don't write checks, they don't send letters, and they certainly don't actively correspond in a fast moving game by snail mail.

If you are trying to grow the hobby, you have lost the war already. PBM? Absolutely not.

Certainly, PBEM is the minimal tolerable advancement in the name of the hobby. Although that isn't exactly scintillating, it at least conveys a technology in play younger than 200 years old. While a phrase around "turn based" is somewhat helpful, that generally conjures a table top game played in an evening. I think "episodic" better conveys the time between turns and the uncertainty that will be unveiled, than does "turn based". Additionally, our standard in PBEM is same day processing as the due date, generally within a few hours of our noon Eastern time deadlines.

So, I recommend the term Episodic Strategy Gaming. Here is a brief excerpt

from a more comprehensive article viewable at <http://www.fallofthegame.com/episodic.asp>:

How an episode is created: The actors (players) record their roles individually, and then through the magic of technology, the recorded parts come together when the episode airs, and then the actions and intrigue are revealed for the first time. They view the episode, and see that some characters have gained advantage through their cunning, and some have been put in difficult circumstances from which they must extricate themselves in the next episode, perhaps by seeking new allies in the cast. Battles have been fought and won, an important character may have died, or an interesting new one introduced into the show. Each episode, the plot takes on new twists. Each episode builds on the one before it, each with unpredictable turns of fate, finally culminating in the season finale – Victory!

Agree, dissent, argue for nostalgia, as you wish. The main point is how to communicate in a single phrase what the hobby is about, in order to be able to reach new players. Is it not?

**- Rick McDowell,
Enlightened Age Entertainment, Inc.**

My vote as an old lady who hates change: some things don't NEED to change! Has it ever seemed odd to you that we still say "dial a phone number,"

when there's no dial, or hear a phone "ring," when the darn thing actually plays an entire symphonic version of the Star Wars theme when somebody calls? Probably not. Some terms have lost touch with their original definition, but still carry meaning in our contemporary vernacular. I would consider "PBM" as a member of that genre, though few games actually involve a postage stamp, these days. "PBM", by mail or not, brings to mind a style of play, a pace, and a level of creativity and interaction that still has a place in today's frenzied MMO, FPS, RTS, RPG world. Let's keep our cherished term, slightly outdated though it may be.

**- Genny White,
Talisman Games**

We (as an industry, or what's left of it) have to have a name to call this stuff. No one name really covers all the bases, past and present, and indicates the proper intentions, and we just can't do without one. So, my opinion is that the original term and acronym is best left well enough alone. If we try to "improve" it, to more properly represent current times, we leave the original methodology completely in the dust. Plus, since the mail-only method has split into so many different ways to game, even picking one of them will leave a wake of disruption and unhappiness in all the other areas. Retaining "PBM" just seems like the path of least resistance, and we should just live with the fact that it's not all truly "by mail," anymore. It's still the same ol'

kind of games, after all, and that's what's most important.

**- Davin Church,
Talisman Games**

I think that PBM is fine for those games that will remain actual Play By Mail versions. That, of course, comes from a member of the Old Guard. I played PBMs when the term was fresh, back in the early 1980s. "Turn Based" seems to be a term that has more current relevance with gamers, and it seems to be a term that encompasses not only PBMs, but PBEMs and other variants, as well. Turn based games is readily recognized by gamers, young and old, and gives players a common ground to discuss a wide range of game systems.

**- Randall Ritnour,
Kgruppe LLC
Takamo and Takamo Universe**

The term PBM is a term steeped in history. Play By Mail in the classic sense still exists, though the act of physically mailing orders and receiving results from those orders via mail is used less and less. Today, most PBM games are actually PBEM or just asynchronous play (i.e.: the use of computers to submit orders directly to online servers and receiving responses). "Asynchronous play" is probably a better term to describe the way games are run, today, which is ever reliant on the use of computers to automate play. The term

"asynchronous play" includes all forms of submitting and receiving of orders and results of those orders. The downside of the term "asynchronous play" is that it is too generic. It does not evoke an emotional response, like the term PBM. So, given that fact, I think sticking with the term PBM to describe the style of play is best.

**- Paul Franz,
Franz Games
Proprietor of SFB Online**

PBM is an interesting anachronism that both fails utterly to describe what has evolved from historical Play by Mail, but at the same time holds the key to describing the binding mechanics of the style of gaming.

Just as American Football is effectively divorced from kicking the ball compared to soccer (as derived from association football), the idea of changing the name to anything else is not considered necessary.

Despite historically being an advocate for a new title for the genre of gaming, I am now of the opinion that it is probably more sensible to simply promote PBM as a genre that embraces its descendents. The reason is two-fold, primarily because anyone that has played PBM previously will know exactly what the genre entails, and secondly, it also indicates that it is a mature genre of gaming and not an off-shoot of MMO's.

The only extension on this is Post-PBM, as indicating games that have gone beyond the original limitations of supplying data in a postal letter i.e.: the benefits of email and online allowing a lot more information to be presented, while still holding true to the turn-based method of submitting orders.

**- Mica Goldstone,
KJC Games**

I think PBM is a great umbrella term for play by mail, play by email or play by web form games. I prefer Turn Based Strategy games where that label fits, but many games include role playing elements that aren't covered by the TBS label.

**- Chris Babcock,
ASCII King Games**

We launched War of Wizards all the way back in 1995, and the modernisation of Play-By-Mail (PBM) back then was that our game was a Play-By-Email (PBEM). We had over 15,000 signups and a core of 150 commercial players, at the game's peak. We still have a few loyal players playing free play tests, but even for these rusted on fans of the game, the sometimes time-consuming and cumbersome text-based orders become too much in the later game, when they control many regions. We are about to launch a crowd funding campaign on www.pozible.com/warofwizards, with the aim of getting a graphical user interface

(app) overlay removing the email requirements. So, that brings us back to the question, without mail and without email what do we call the game?

I don't have the answer, but I remember an editorial in an earlier issue of Suspense & Decision which touched on the issue, and I agree that what separates this genre from other games these days is the "Turn Based Play". People putting orders through, waiting for a deadline, and then receiving a turn report to see the outcome. TURN BASED ONLINE GAME (TBOG) is going to be my best crack at answering this question, although I'm sure there will be a sexier answer out there, somewhere.

**- Dave Harris,
WoW Games**

While the term PBM (play by mail) is outdated, it is a recognised term for many people, and so, still appropriate, at least for old school players. However, to attract new players, a term like 'turn-based games' might be better. Personally, I prefer to still use PBM and also PBEM (play by email), and having the term explained to people, rather than ditching it. I haven't really come across what I'd consider to be a suitably pithy replacement, which the uninitiated would immediately grasp, so it'll be interesting to hear if anyone else has!

**- Richard Watts,
Agema**

We use a few different terms. PBM is generally useful, as it has been used for long enough that a proportion of gamers know what that is without further explanation, but seemed slightly confusing, since at Harlequin we've moved entirely away from postal delivery. So, we've opted to use the term 'Turn-based gaming' which seems to cover all aspects, irrespective of delivery mechanism.

**- Edward Lane,
Harlequin Games**

To me, the term does not fit. Well yeah, technically you get a report by (e)mail and you send orders by mail. But the first one everyone does is making a graphical tool (viewer, excel, etc), because the mail thing is so outdated.

There are 2 concepts, in the game that I play (Olympia, Atlantis, ...) :

- the first one is "turn based strategy". Every week, we get a turn. You could fasten the pace, as we have played some test games, on a daily basis. The strategy level is quite deep, it's not the casual clicky on the web that you can play while doing something else, simultaneously.

I want to show you a deep turn based strategy game on the web, that mimics close the games that I play and maybe board games.

<http://blight.ironhelmet.com/>

- the second concept is "multiplayer". Our games are played with 20 - 200 individuals.

Games that favour human interaction always have an edge, compared to solo games, in terms of duration. Call it factions, guild, clans, etc., but they all come down to like minded groups. In a group you share the same goal and your involvement in the game is bigger.

Let me point you out to two games that completely understand the human interaction and put it forward :

<http://www.eveonline.com/sandbox>
(the player roles apply to any game)

<https://goblinworks.com/pathfinder-online/sandboxes/>
(player content lasts forever, GM/DM set the rules or the environment)

**- Tom Droeshout,
Olympia G4**

The industry term should likely change to PBEM, given how little mail is used for games. In a large number of cases, I think this change has already been made. Personally, I think there is a huge opportunity to transfer the game worlds and systems onto Apps, which is the new 'in' system, but that's another story!

**- James Patterson,
Player of Legends, Fallen Empires,
Xott, & Alamaze**

In response to the question "What is your current view about the term PBM (play by mail)" one must first address and have an understanding of what a PBM game is. So I would first ask what is a play-by-mail game anyway?

That would seem a simple straightforward concept, but I've had more than one conversation debating this simple point. Like art, you'll know it when you see it, but opinions may differ. For my purposes I believe assume that a PBM game must meet two criteria, the game is turn-based, and it was designed to be played by mail.

Time for some definitions:

Almost all board games are turn-based, you take your turn then wait for your opponents to respond with varying degrees of interaction. In the context of play-by-mail turns are submitted, processed either as a batch or in the order received, and results returned, via some form of "mail". Mail in this context could include standard, drop a letter in the box, post office delivered, mail (otherwise known as snail mail), email, or a web interface/forum. The key is game mechanic of turns being submitted, processed, and results returned, unlike real-time game where orders are issued and actions taken by all players simultaneously and continuously. I love and play many real-time games, StarCraft II is one example, and clearly this is not a play-by-mail game. Neither are many games on the

Internet which, while lacking the graphics of a StarCraft, are none the less real-time simulations.

While I may take a little heat over that, where I really get into trouble with some people is when I maintain that a play-by-mail game is a game designed to be played by mail. I've already said mail here could be standard mail, email, or a web interface/forum, but I maintain that the game needs to have been designed for play in that medium for it to be a play-by-mail game. For example, Diplomacy is by far one of the most popular games played by mail, and has been for decades, but it was designed as a board game and has been adapted to being played by mail. Dungeons and Dragons is a face-to-face role playing game, but many people have adapted it to be played via a forum on a website. Advanced Squad Leader is a board wargame that can also be played via a java application on the web. By contrast games like my own Galactic Empires, of Flying Buffalo's Starweb, were designed to be played by mail, playing them any other way is an adaptation of the original.

So to be clear, and to answer the original question, I feel the term PBM as it relates to games defined by the criteria above is the best term to describe the branch of the gaming hobby devoted to, guess what, PBM games. There is no other term I would prefer to use now, or going forward. PBM gaming is a rich and diverse hobby in its own right and

deserved more dedication and less blending with board and table top games in an effort to make us feel better as a part of a bigger overall hobby.

**- Mark Wardell,
Wy'East Games**

I am split into two minds over PBM. It is nostalgic and reminds me of my youth and all of the excitement when receiving turns through the post, and I think there is still an audience out there that remembers those days, and when they see the term PBM, they know what to expect.

However if PBM games are to survive, they have to get a younger audience hooked onto it, and I am not sure PBM gets across what the games are all about.

For a start, most games, now, have an internet/e-mail option to them, so it is no longer mail, which sounds very old fashioned and is off putting. It needs a better term to describe what the games are about, and the best that I can think of is turn based gaming. Most games you put a turn in and receive the results back, before putting in more turns, repeat until end of game. It's not perfect, as it is too reminiscent of a board game description, but then again, I believe a lot of people who play board games would also like PBM games, and we need to expand and overlap into other gaming areas, to draw new people in. There are lots of people out there who would love

to play our games, they just don't know it, yet, and finding the keywords to attract them is half the battle.

**- Amber,
Skeletal Software**

The acronym PBM only seems to be useful talking with anyone who has in the past, or currently plays. Outside of that group it isn't well recognized, and that includes among the RPG (role playing game) and MMOG (massively multiplayer online game) people I have interacted with, particularly in the past five years. At which point I need to go on and explain it. Though email still exists as a method, simply hearing the idea of "mail" seems to conjure up the idea of an era that's gone and which things like the MMOG have improved on - which really is more an improvement on the MUD (better known as the multi user dungeon of the BBS era) and probably the only other term perceived as a relic, albeit a more recognized one. As to whether or not there is a better term, that's a tough one, especially in an era where so many things have acronyms. Play by Submission (a more general terms) would become the same acronym as the Public Broadcasting Stations in the US, PBS. Whatever evolves- if there is a change - needs to be accurate enough to describe the method of submitting to a remote games master, let flexible enough to allow a wide enough umbrella under it as technology evolves. There's really not a simple answer to this.

**- Shannon Muir,
Long time PBM player & PBM fiction
author**

I love PBM and "PBM"! As an old school grognard who has been playing by snail mail and email for many years, I know how much fun it is when a game turn lands in your mailbox. In college in the early '80s, it was D&D by mail, when our DM went on an internship and ran a game from across the state. And it was a professional space-based game, with a point-based race creation system and probes to explore other systems. In the Peace Corps, playing Chess and D&D through the mail kept me connected to gamer friends back home on the other side of the planet. And since my "real" life began, playing Diplomacy, both through snail mail zines and then through email, has satisfied my love of gaming when it was impossible to find the time for a local group.

The term "Play By Mail" is still a fine one. It works for email and physical mail. It is well known and widespread. It ain't broke, so let's not "fix" it!

**- Cayzle Alterio,
Woldian Games**

I think that the term (PBM), itself, is not the problem. Besides, nothing actually requires that a single term be dominant. Some individuals may crave it, but the fact of the matter is that reality doesn't dictate it.

The beauty of any particular acronym or descriptive term lies in the eyes of the beholder. It simply isn't an issue that requires unanimity of opinion. To insist upon one descriptive term over all others serves only to pigeonhole, which only serves to further splinter the industry, rather than unify it. In the marketplace of ideas, multiple descriptive terms may well flourish, simultaneously, ad infinitum. While having a single term might be very convenient, the very fact it's still being argued over seems to underscore how unrealistic that scenario is. Technological progress does not always bring with it marketing convenience, such as the convenience embodied in an elusive single descriptive term. There is no panacea. Technology did not render marketing either obsolete or unnecessary.

Furthermore, to focus upon the term, rather than upon the substance of the games at issue, though, is to largely miss the point. There doesn't have to be victory in singular, where descriptive terms are concerned, in order for the industry to flourish. The passage of time invariably brings with it changes in technology. New things become possible, as do new ways of doing old things. However, while technological progress made the Internet possible, in the first instance, and ubiquitous, in the second instance, the art of describing things is literary in nature, not technological.

Furthermore, strict orthodoxy in descriptive terminology is a self-

defeating proposition. The human imagination is not so easily limited, and neither is the human ability to describe.

Unilateral assertions that PBM is defunct, from a technological standpoint, do not negate the enduring value of the term, from either a literary standpoint or a communication standpoint.

I run a website called PlayByMail.Net. For months on end, now, I have published a magazine that I characterize as "A PBM magazine for the 21st Century!" Yet, when I named the magazine, itself, I departed from convention. For that name, I looked to the essence of what lay at the crux of such gaming experiences. The distilled essence yielded the magazine's name, Suspense & Decision.

However, when I author articles for the magazine, I simultaneously embrace multiple different descriptive terms for games, yet I am a slave to none of them. It does me no injury for gamers, game moderators, or anyone else to call such games whatever they want to call them. Thus, I am unmoved by calls to abandon the term PBM.

Why? Because, I have yet to be persuaded by any of the lines of argument offered up in support of replacing it, with whatever the latest fad word or gimmick of vocabulary that critics of the term have managed to muster, to date.

In my considered opinion, the operative word in the term "play by mail" is play - not mail. Yet, the dispute invariably hinges on the mail part of the equation. The play part isn't in dispute, since play goes hand-in-hand with the concept of having fun. The bottom line of what you do with a game - with any type or genre or style of game - is that you play it.

From my perspective, the mail portion of the equation is not the culmination of the PBM experience. Rather, that can only be achieved by actually playing the game. Mail is merely a facilitator mechanism, one that facilitates players being able to actually do something else - namely, play. Accordingly, the mail aspect of the term PBM is secondary, whereas the play aspect is primary.

The core issue is one of entertainment in game form, not methodology of delivery of the game, itself. The games in question have a certain sort of flair to them, an entertainment moxie all their own. What I love about them is the experience of playing them, regardless of the method whereby I play them. Ancestral descendants of PBM games may be technologically more advanced than their turn-based predecessors, but that does not mean that they necessarily provide a superior entertainment experience to their PBM precursors.

Without a doubt, changes in technology have opened up new vistas of opportunity for gaming to flourish. All sorts of new possibilities manifest in the

wake of technological progress. But, that's not the exact, same thing as obsolescence. Confusing the two does a service to no one.

Even where obsolescence, itself, is at issue, the mere fact that obsolescence may manifest itself with regard to a particular aspect of a gaming genre does not automatically serve as a self-executing indictment of every last aspect of the entire genre. For instance, the anticipation factor associated with receiving turn results via postal games remains as high as ever.

If anything about PBM is obsolete, then it is the industry's dated reliance upon antiquated pricing schemes, not the postal factor of the equation.

On the cost end of things, the cost of postage constitutes a core business expense, one that PBM companies unsurprisingly pass on to their players. Yet, the actual cost of postage is not the driving factor in perception that PBM games are expensive.

Set-up fees and a fee structure based primarily around the per-turn method, not to mention various other fees that PBM companies have implemented over time, have conspired to render PBM games less attractive, from a cost-value analysis, than postage ever has.

If you look at PBM games, in terms of time invested to play them, technological progress and the passage of time have

actually benefitted PBM games, in that people routinely spend more time on Facebook, these days, than many die-hard PBM gamers ever spent on PBM games at the height of postal gaming's popularity. Time is money, they say. But, the true value of any game is not dictated by just the face value of price, alone. In truth, entertainment value is a combination of many factors.

What to call the term used to describe PBM-esque games conjures up memories of the tale of Romeo and Juliet. To quote fair Juliet, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." In earnest truth, I am neither Montague nor Capulet, when it comes to play by mail, turn-based, or even episodic games. I intermingle with descriptive terms freely. But, I play games to have fun. My love affair with PBM games endures, even still, all these many years later - not because of nostalgia, but because of the sum total of the overall experience that the games, themselves, have to offer.

The argument over what to call them endures, as well, but the argument is, at best, little more than boisterous distraction, whereas the games, themselves, remain as fun and as substantial as ever to play. Which is more important, I wonder? The fun? Or the argument?

**- Charles Mosteller,
Managing Editor
Suspense & Decision magazine**

Play-by-Mail is going to remain the term for this hobby for a long time to come. I do have a problem with this, in that it is likely scaring away new players. I have friends who like strategy board games, but who shudder at the thought of sending and receiving large turn printouts. I rather like the term Play By Post, because it supports many platforms -- email, web, forum, Facebook, and yes, postal gaming (with an amusing double-entendre.) But, I believe some people already use this term to describe what amounts to Play By Forum. (I believe this is mainly for people running hand-moderated role-playing games for small groups.)

One of my favorite PBM magazines started out as PBM Universal, but changed its name to Gaming Universal after the first issue, specifically to broaden its appeal as it sat on hobby shop shelves. (Does Bob McLain care to chime in, here?) I thought intentionally broadening the scope was not the best way to go -- it removes the specific flavor and appeal of this niche.

Turn-based gaming is the only real contender, at this point. It's flawed, in that many other games are turn-based, which have nothing to do with PBM. Some other games distinguish themselves from their peers as turn-based -- fans of Civilization, for example, call it a turn-based computer game, as opposed to real-time strategy or first-

person. Still, it might stick, as the PBM-likes rise in popularity and variety.

But, PBM remains a nice evocative brand, and will likely remain so for many years to come.

**- Bernd Jaehnigen,
Associate Editor
Suspense & Decision magazine**



**ROAD OF
KINGS**

www.warbarron.com

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

Murderhobos

**SECOND
EDITION**

a tabletop RPG of adventurers
who kill things and
take their stuff

bit.ly/MurderHobos

HISHAM
2014

At Face Value

A look at the Facebook numbers

May 29th, 2014

Facebook Page	# of Likes
Flying Buffalo, Inc.	1,410 Likes (+9)
Empires at War 1805	353 Likes (+4)
Takamo Universe	241 Likes (+9)
Clash of Legends	113 Likes (0)
Phoenix: Beyond the Stellar Empire	97 Likes (+2)
Diplomacy on USAK	84 Likes (+1)
Starweb	83 Likes (+1)
Rolling Thunder Games	66 Likes (0)
Duel2	66 Likes (+1)
Fallen Empires PBE	39 Likes (0)
Rimworlds	35 Likes (0)
Galactic Prisoners	30 Likes (+1)
Alamaze	27 Likes (0)
It's a Crime	26 Likes (0)
PlayByMail.Net	26 Likes (+11)

May 29th, 2014

Facebook Discussion Group	# of members
Diplomacy World	352 members (N/A)
Hyborian War	54 members (+2)
Middle-Earth PBM	46 members (+1)
Phoenix BSE	36 members (0)
Forgotten Realms	39 members (+2)
Legends	32 members (+2)
Starfleet Warlord	41 members (+11)
Science Fiction Writers and Artists Group for Takamo Universe	25 members (+1)
Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive	22 members (0)
Lands of Nevron	19 members (0)
Duel2	12 members (+1)
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. Want your page added to this list? [Contact us!](#)

Diplomacy World



Issue #125 - Spring 2014
www.diplomacyworld.net



Issue #124 - Winter 2013
www.diplomacyworld.net



Diplomacy World



Issue #123 - Fall 2013
www.diplomacyworld.net



Diplomacy World



Diplomacy World



Issue #122 - Summer 2013
www.diplomacyworld.net



The Posh World of Diplomacy

The Plot to ALWAYS Support Edi Into Belgium

Charles Mosteller

There's an arms race going on. You may not know it. You just might be completely oblivious to it. But, and you may just have to trust me on this, I swear that it's the truth.

To be certain, it's not your typical arms race. Some of those participating in it, some of those fueling it, in fact, don't even seem to have a clue that they are on the brink of war.

Conflict has already broken out. The fog of war has enveloped everything, and those glorious warmongering bastards over at [Diplomacy World](#) seem to be winning. I take consolation in the fact that they seem to dwell in the Valley of Ignorance, where these particular matters are concerned.

So, what in the Hell am I talking about, anyway?

Here at Suspense & Decision magazine, we labor slavishly, in horrendous conditions and with only the most barebones of staff, beset by confusion at every turn, with no real clue on how to go about producing a magazine.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the fence, where the grass of gaming is always greener, those Diplomacy fellows are busy like a bunch - nay, an army - of eager beavers, just churning out issue after issue of Diplomacy World magazine.

Don't even get me started on all of the so-called "independent" zines being published by Diplomacy players, either!

Issue after issue, chock full of all sorts of good stuff about the game which serves as their magazine's namesake and inspiration - *Diplomacy*. It's sickening!

How in the world are we ever supposed to compete against all that?

Completely demoralizing! No other way to put it. But, in spite of their preponderance of literary strength, we're not about to surrender.

Their readership numbers in the thousands - maybe even well into the millions! Those Diplomacy fellows are well versed in the art of propaganda, you know. Can't trust anything that they say.

It's all roses for those glory boys, what with their fancy conventions and their rich legacy of Diplomacy zines. Even still, for all their countless successes (which go uncounted to this very day), they won't be satisfied until every last man, woman, and child on the face of this planet embraces their cult of gaming vigor.

Me? I'm late to it all. No surprise, there. Yeah, yeah, I heard your mumbling in the back. This is no time for mutiny, people. After all, if you don't read

Suspense & Decision, who will? See where I'm coming from, now? What do you mean, no?

Oh, sure, I've heard of Diplomacy before. I first heard of it many years back. But, I've never played it. **::GASP!::**

They say that confession is good for the soul. Besides, who has time to play Diplomacy, these days, much less learn how to play it? I'm a PBM fellow. They wouldn't have me. Diplomacy players trace their Diplomacy bloodlines. That's what I've been told. Posh people, they are.

I must confess, though, that Diplomacy arch-guru, Larry Peery, seemed to be onto something, when he suggested back in [Diplomacy World Issue # 124](#) that people create a one or two page mini-Diplomacy `zine, and send it to some other nefarious mastermind of Diplomacy tactics named Jim Burgess. I don't know Larry, and I don't know Jim, but a good idea is still a good idea, even if it does originate from within the ranks of the Diplomacy elite. It's a chance to drive Jim nuts, after all.

PBM could use a few more nuts, come to think of it.

It's not enough, apparently, for Larry Peery to author an article about growing the Diplomacy hobby. No, not Larry! Leave it to this guy that I don't know from Adam to take it upon himself to start writing a whole series of articles about growing the hobby of the game that he loves, this game called

Diplomacy. Quaint name for a game you've got there, fellows!

But, God forbid that Larry (whom we're warned in Issue # 124 of Diplomacy World - right there at the bottom of page # 9, if you don't believe me - should not be encouraged) be the only literary heavyweight churning out articles for the Diplomacy masses.

No, there's a whole bunch of these Diplominati people all working in concert to perfect this tool of theirs that they intend to use to take over the world of gaming - this literary tour de force of Diplomacy everything.

Damn them all! I think that they're making progress. But, that's not what worries me.

No, what worries me is that they are going to finagle this Diplomacy game of theirs into everybody's head, and then nobody will be thinking about other games that you can play by mail, nor their ancestral descendants.

I can hear Jim Burgess' maniacal laughter cackling, right now - and I've never even heard him laugh, before.

Thank God that I, at least, have not fallen prey to their worthwhile articles and their colorful maps and their photographs of people enjoying Diplomacy. . .yet.

What's that, you ask? Why have I been rummaging through Diplomacy World back issues? Uh...I'm out of space, it seems.



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

War of Wizards

How a game changes over almost 20 Years of Development

David Harris

After 19 years of development, 17,000+ signups and over 100 individual games, WoW Games is launching a crowd funding campaign to develop a new interface for War of Wizards. (Campaign Page www.pozible.com/warofwizards)

BACKGROUND

War of Wizards the PBeM game was founded in 1995, the same year as two other internet start-ups; YAHOO and ebay. Unfortunately, the three ventures haven't had the same trajectory over the past 20 years, but I found it interesting to reflect on the changes in technology and the Play-By-Mail (PBM) genre over that period, in the context of War of Wizards (WoW, with our version of the acronym significantly pre-dating World of Warcraft).

My first exposure to PBM was well before this through "G.M. – The Independent Role Playing Magazine" in 1989. Living in relative isolation on a farm, the whole idea of PBM really appealed to me, and I promptly designed my own. Being only 12 years old at the time, it unsurprisingly was never launched, but the seed had been sown.

1995 was my and Chris', my partner in WoW Games, first year at University, where we both lived on campus, after having attended the same country

Game: [War of Wizards](#)

Type: Strategic fantasy game

Price: Originally \$2/turn - \$10 or less per game ([Pozible campaign](#))

Format: PBeM (Play By e-Mail)

Company: WoW Games

school. It was on a LINUX computer in the library we came across Atlantis 2.0, which we both played, myself having some basic success walking into a, for some unknown reason, unguarded region and making it my own. I found myself spending much of my week thinking about orders, and desperately waiting for the turn reports to come back. At this stage, I was hooked.

With Chris studying Computer Science, he was keen to put his programming skills to use, so we decided to make our own Play-By-EMail (PBeM) game. Incorporating the game play I would personally want to see in a game, WoW 1.0 was designed and programmed. With a small core of play testers, the basic game was up and running. The game quickly evolved, and a year later, WoW 2.0 was launched, which is the basis of the game which still exists, today.

THE GAME

War of Wizards is a strategy, fantasy game involving wizards raising armies, managing resources, and researching magic. As a player, you can: Send heroes exploring towers, caves, and graveyards; build armies and send them out to conquer your enemies; research the magic arts in areas ranging from Necromancy to Druidic; construct towns, defences, and buildings such as Sages Guilds, Taverns, Ship Yards, and Beast Pits; feed peasants generously or enslave them. Basically, you can do as you wish.

The only restriction is surviving the onslaught of other wizards with similar megalomaniacal intentions. Diplomacy is the key, conversing with other wizards to trade resources, forge alliances, and backstab others.

WoW 2.0 is set in a variety of fantasy worlds. You take the role of a wizard, leading one of the many cities inhabited by one of the 16 races of the worlds of WoW.

Of all the games I've seen, Masters of Magic, the turn based strategy video game by Simtex, is the closest match to WoW (in fact, many aspects were so similar I suspected a former WoW player may have been involved in designing it, until I realised their original version predated ours). I noticed a recent Kickstarter Campaign for an updated version of Masters of Magic called Worlds of Magic, which is quite exciting, but hopefully, the upcoming WoW app will be

even more so.

STRENGTHS OF THE GAME

Over its first few years of existence, WoW had over 17,000 signups for free play tests, and at its peak, had over 150 paying commercial players. I believe there were a number of things we did right that lead to this growth (remembering this is in the context of the Internet almost 20 years ago).

Player Interaction – WoW is not a game which can be won by working in isolation. Alliances and trade are key, and I believe it's the diplomacy (and sometimes back stabbing) which makes the game addictive. What separates PBEM from other Turn Based computer games is the amount of time and thought which goes into orders. With the usual space between turns being one week, this provides an extended opportunity to strategize with allies or negotiate with neutrals/enemies

Build a Community to contribute to the Development of the Game – There are a number of veteran players who understand the game better than I do, as its designer. Over the years, many of the new features (or fixes for old ones) have been due to player contributions. Not only has this been vital in the development of the game, but it has also heightened engagement levels amongst players. The WoW Discussion Group (WDG) still runs, today, with players who have been with us for over a decade. Turn credits in commercial games or in-game gold for free play tests are given

as rewards for spotting bugs.

User Generated Content – While the base map and story was in place for each game, players were able to generate “Blurbs,” which gave the story for their individual wizard and capital city and “News,” which is an update that came out weekly in line with turn reports. To encourage contributions, in-game rewards of gold were made in free play test games, or partial turn credits in commercial games. Beyond contributions within the games, some players also took it a step further, and designed their own maps and stories for others to play.

Rankings – Each game has a Rankings page showing comparisons amongst the players on a variety of metrics. Beyond this, though, was an overall rankings page combining points across games played (best 10 games counted). This led to quite fierce competition, and obviously encouraged players to become involved in additional games. At various stages, we also launched tournaments, which again produced intensive periods of game play (particularly the 2 on 2 version, where players entered in pairs).

WEAKNESSES OF THE GAME

Cumbersome orders – Text based orders don’t really fly in this day and age of point & click or drag & drop. While old school PBEM players are happy to continue typing orders, it limits the appeal of the game to the new generation (and even our most dedicated players lose enthusiasm in the later

stages of the game, with many regions occupied and pages of orders required to control them and their armies).

Drop Outs – While we had very impressive figures for signups and players entering free play tests, we have also had very high dropout rates, as the game certainly isn’t for everyone, and takes a degree of dedication to play. Drop outs, in turn, unbalance games, as some players get to expand into unguarded territory, while others have to fight for every inch.

Manual Processing Requirements – While the entire system had a degree of automation, there has always been a degree of frustration from players who are waiting for tasks to be manually processed, such as setting up games. The lack of automation also limited the amount we could expand during the boom times.

CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY

Servers – We’ve come a long way from running the modem line to the telephone socket, and waiting for the ding-dong, ding-dong...squelch tone to confirm we’ve managed to dial into the university server. By the time we had our own servers, one of our old problems was the occasional brief power outage at Chris’s house, where a bunch of old computers sat hosting the game. Cloud computing has removed those hassles, and left us with options to quickly scale up, whenever extra processing power is needed.

Promotion – Back in the day, I think we landed a large number of hits from Greg Lindahl's PBeM LIST site. I'm convinced that supply and demand was quite different for PBeM, back then. We were also members of Web Rings, which are a concept you really don't see as much of, these days. Banner Exchanges were also big, but to be honest, I really can't work out where 17,000 signups came from.

Revenue Streams – For advertising, we had a deal that we would probably struggle to replicate these days, with 80 cents per 1000 impressions and 15c per click through. For playing commercial games, the charge was \$2 per turn, which seems expensive in the context of a 99c App, these days, but is also still only \$2 per week, if you look at it that way. With so many other options for generating revenue these days, such as micro-payments or crowd funding, there seems to be both more possibilities, but also more competition for the gaming dollar.

Payments – How much easier would life have been back then, had Paypal been in existence. Wiring funds, money orders, converting cheques into Australian dollars or KAGI (a downloadable computer program that encrypted credit card details to then be emailed) were our only options. Now, there are so many 3rd party options in place, now, we no longer need to look at opening a merchant account with the local bank.

WHAT NOW FOR WoW

For over a decade, a graphical user

interface has been needed for WoW to achieve ease of game play. In today's world of Apps, with connectivity pretty much everywhere you go, there is certainly an opportunity to take, in my opinion, a great underlying game and modernize it. We are looking to maintain the same PBeM, but provide an optional interface which will, let's face it, take a lot of the headaches out of implementing orders, and jazz up the presentation of a turn report. The world's our oyster, when it then comes to how far we and the WoW community go with graphics and other features.

While this vision has been in place for a while, the time (and, in my case, skill set) hasn't been available. Our proposed solution is a crowd funding campaign, to enable outsourced development of the new game interface. Any assistance, either in advice or a pledge on our crowd funding page www.pozible.com/warofwizards, is much appreciated!

After 19 years, we hope to bring a new and improved game experience, soon!



Be part of a gallant stand - Play PBM and Turn-Based games!



Clash of Legends

FUN AND FREE STRATEGIC GAMES SINCE 2006

PHOENIXBSE.COM



CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT QUITE SIMPLY MAKES IT AHEAD OF THE GAME.

Submission Deadline
for Issue # 8 is
June 20th, 2014

Articles - Reviews - Op-Eds - Photos

Have something to say?
Be part of the dialogue.
Immortalize your opinion!

Suspense & Decision
magazine

PBM needs YOU

Are YOU getting the full picture??

PlayByMail.Net on Facebook



We're not looking for "likes."

COME CHECK US OUT

We're looking for **YOU!**



The Galactic Trade and Transport corporation wants you!

The GTT is the periphery's premier chartered corporation and we are searching for new members. While other affiliations are looking for employees, we are seeking partners. Members who will help plan for the future and carry out the tasks that advance those plans. We are one of the oldest, continuously operating affiliations in the Phoenix universe with a strong core group of members. Our primary mission is planetary development and interstellar trade. The GTT has openings for Fleet Managers and Starbase Governors. We maintain a state-of-the-art battle fleet for those with more adventurous spirits. All skill levels are welcome and we pride ourselves on being newbie friendly. Those who wish to play the free game only are invited to check us out as well. The GTT - *it's more than just a game!* For more information, contact: [James Stryker](#), CEO of the GTT

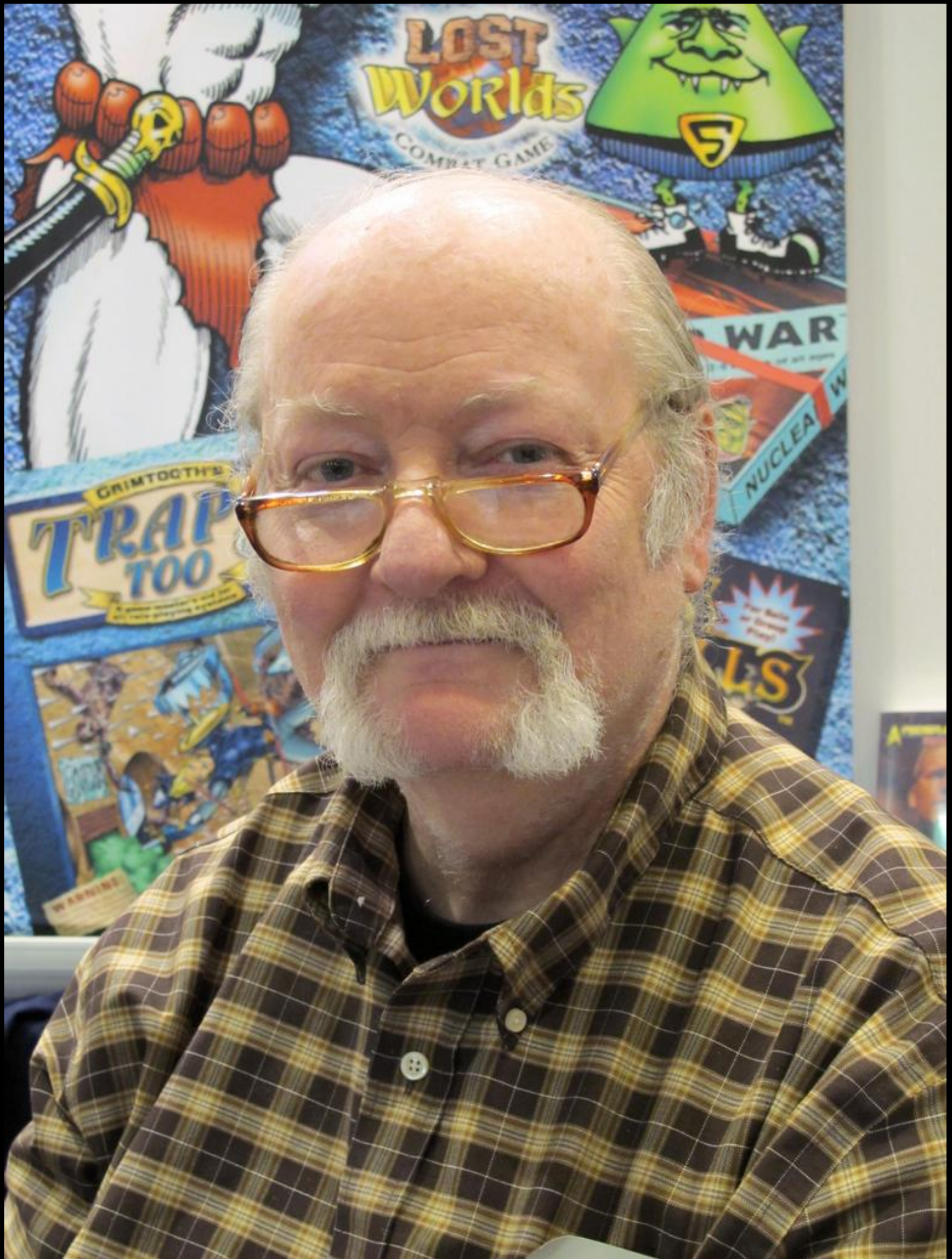
Suspense & Decision



Photo Gallery

Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo, Inc.

(Get your turn orders in...*or else!*)

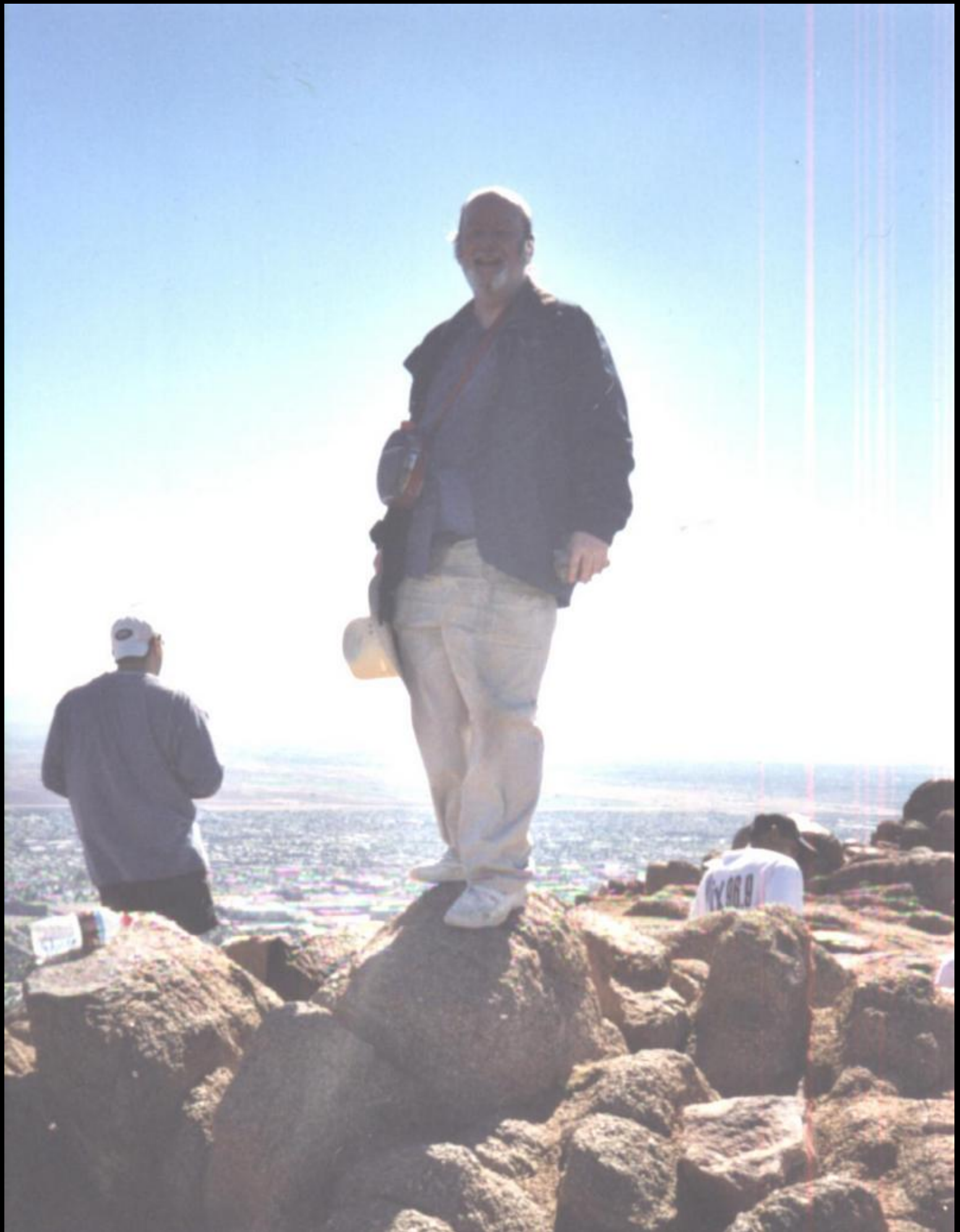




Which Cub Scout is Rick Loomis?



A hug a day keeps the flying buffalo away.





www.ALAMAZE.co (not .com)

April, 2013 kicked off the return of Alamaze and our **players are having a blast**. Dozens of new Alamaze games have started in the past few months in our **five active formats** in what we collectively call Alamaze Classic. They have made **more than 9000 posts** in over 600 threads in that time on our [Players' Forum](#). Visit it to see the action and the many topics.

Players receive **attractively formatted results** (including graphics) in PDF files and players are enjoying getting their results within a few hours after the turn deadline, consistently. Turns currently are on a **twice-a-week cycle** which players love and **fees are kept low** by our new monthly subscription plans that can equate to **less than \$2.00 a turn** (our Warrior Level Service is \$26.95 for about 14 turns a month in two games) instead of the old \$7.50: quite a difference! See a sample turn result and kingdom dossier on our website: [What is Alamaze?](#)

Lead your kingdom to glory eternal! Call up your bannermen, summon your wizards, dispatch your spies, sound the horns of battle and charge!



Discover ALAMAZE! [SIGN UP](#) NOW!

Quick & Dirty

Total NOOB's Guide to Alamaze

Bernd Jaehnigen

I myself am 14 turns into my first game, so this first Quick and Dirty article will be noob-to-noob.

15 possible kingdoms you can run in a standard game

AN - The Secret Servants of the **Ancient Ones**

Start in Amberland/Torvale
Awesome at politics and special actions, not so much at anything else.

BL - The Dark Skies of the **Black Dragons**

Start in Southern Sands/Arcania
Strong military. No seapower, but can fly over water. Average otherwise.

DA - The Onyx Imperium of the **Dark Elves**

Start in Eastern Steppes/Synisvania
Well-balanced in all areas.

DE - The Seven Hells of the **Demon Princes**

Start in Arcania/Southern Sands
Very strong politically. Military is weak, but with special powers, moves, and attacks.

Quick and Dirty will endeavor to give new players a quick on-ramp to specific PBM games. It will run through the common game ideas, starting positions, early moves, and hidden gotchas. It will not be comprehensive, complete, or even 100% accurate. It will, however, get you up and running with some basic familiarity and some level of confidence.

DW - The **Dwarves** of the Talking Mountains

Start in Talking Mountains/Eastern Steppes
Good at fighting, great at politics and economy, and bad at magic and spying. Slow, but with magic portals and resistance to magic.

EL - The High **Elves** of the Golden Woods

Start in Oakendell/Northern Mists
Balanced position with a protected start in the corner and some political advantages.

GI - The Stone **Giants** Above the Trembling Ground
Start in Amberland/Oakendell
Very strong militarily and a large group of diplomats, weaker on economics and magic. Central location will require diplomacy.

GN - The **Gnomish** Bastions of Alchemy
Start in Runnimeade/Torvale
Excellent economy, but weak military.
Good potential for magic growth. Sleeper role.

RA - The **Rangers** of the Frontier Marches
Start in Synisvania/Southern Sands
Very good military with best generals and good agents/diplomats. Average otherwise.

RD - The Reign of Terror of the **Red Dragons**
Start in Talking Mountains/Runnimeade
Very powerful military, and can fly over water without seapower. Good starting gold. Weak politically.

SO - The Hidden Realm of the Unseen **Sorcerer**
Start in Synisvania/Southern Sands
Very powerful magically, given time to grow. Weak military, but good initial defense.

TR - The **Troll** Uprising
Start in Torvale/Amberland
Strong military and economy, and can issue extra orders each turn! Not great in other areas.

UN - The Shadow Brotherhood of the **Underworld**
Start in Runnimeade/Talking Mountains
Best at covert ops and strong economy. Bad military. Dispersed somewhat.

WA - The Fiery Reach of the Red **Warlock**
Start in Amberland/Synisvania
Excellent magical potential, weak military. Needs time to grow. Can teleport?

WI - The **Witchlord's** Empire of Doom
Start in Northern Mists/Oakendell
Best magic potential and some good troops. Weak in politics. Sea offers some protection.

Common acronyms you might run into

PC = Population Center
NAP = Non-Aggression Pact
ESO = Early Strategic Objective
SVC = Secret Victory Condition

10 Regions of Alamaze

Oakendell - lots of woods (northwest)

Northern Mists - protective sea (north)

Talking Mountains - massive mountain range (northeast)

Torvale - western ocean, woods, plains (west)

Amberland - varied terrain right in the middle (center)

Eastern Steppes - varied terrain and protective sea (east)

Runnimeade - swamps and hills (southwest)

Arcania - varied terrain (south)

Synisvania - swamps and water (southeast)

Southern Sands - desert and hills (deep south)

General tips for a new player

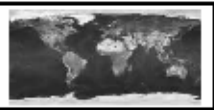
- * You MUST sign up for a new game on the forum. It is not enough to email them and send money.
- * The kingdoms are well-balanced. Pick your favorite based on fantasy flavor. Or, pick based on the avenue of play you like best -- military might, magic, spying, individual heroics and artifacts, etc.
- * Contact your neighboring players early. Your first few turns will be spent trying to consolidate local towns and villages. You will not get rushed on turn one.
- * Sell surplus food. Sell your ships. You will need more gold than you have.
- * Combat comes before movement.

Move your troops/agents into position, and attack NEXT turn. Your opponents will usually be warned of your actions.

- * It will be tempting to focus solely on your strengths, but you should devote some slice of your power to buffer up where you are weak.
- * After the early game, your economy loosens up -- you will have enough villages and towns to pay for everything.
- * Multiple groups can NOT attack together. They can only attack in turn. You will need to move troops from one group to another to truly merge your forces.
- * Get a high priestess early, and use her to find all the towns and villages in any region you want to take over. This will be faster than spying/searching.
- * Don't spend your starting money too fast. Keep some in hand until your economy is humming.
- * Save some food up for Winter turns!
- * Secure your borders with Non-Aggression Pacts so you can focus on one initial enemy.
- * Pick one friendly neighbor and try to declare them an ally.
- * Share data with friends. Hide it from others. Information is the ultimate trump card.

www.alamaze.co

[Alamaze Forum](#)



PBM BEACHHEAD EXPANDS PLAY-BY-MAIL GAMING ADVANCING ON ALL FRONTS

Tired of the same old thing?

Are you ready to join the PBM invasion that is sweeping the gaming world?

They're back from the past, but they're as fun as ever - PBM games!

But, not just PBM games - This time, they've brought their ancestral descendants with them.

Whether you live in a big city or a small town, or whether you're just drifting aimlessly on the Internet, isn't it time that you manned up, and took a step back in time, into the future of gaming?

Why risk a crisis??

Sure, there are other games, but are they doing the job for you?

The real playground, when it comes to gaming, is the imagination. How far is yours being stretched?

Why let boredom butcher your time? There's a better way!

Join the Gaming Expeditionary Force of the 21st Century!

PBM has invaded.

The beachhead expands!

**New fun awaits
the soul that dares
to game!!**

Diplomacy Zines Through The Ages

The Unearthing of an Anti-PBM Conspiracy

Charles Mosteller

Having spent the better part of the day rummaging through ancient archives of Diplomacy zines, an exercise eerily reminiscent of a scene that you might see in an old B grade horror flick, I believe that I may just be onto something.

No one is more aware than I am that I've already included an article about the game, Diplomacy, in this issue. Surely, that qualifies us for some kind of prize, or even better, perhaps a major award of some sort. But, as I glance out my window, nowhere is a parade forming. This, quite frankly, is more than just a little disappointing.

Be that as it may, turning my attention back to the dust-covered electronic variants of these relics of Diplomacy days gone by, what I am finding is that my initial instinct about Diplomacy (and by extension, those who play that D game) was correct, all along.

I want to be upfront with anyone reading this article. I have NEVER played a game of Diplomacy, before. Which, of course, makes me imminently qualified to speak on the subject at hand.

But, such trivial details as Diplomacy pedigree aside, the more of these corpses. . .er. . .zines that I dig up, the more irrefutable that the evidence

becomes.

But, before you all gather to burn me at the Good Stake of Heresy, hear me out as I dare to speak the truth that has, thus far, eluded the entire gaming world.

I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. You're thinking that I can't be right, that somehow, I must be wrong. I only wish that I was.

Before Rick Loomis flies in on his trusty steed of a buffalo, and begins to whack me about the head with a shovel for rambling on with no discernible sense of purpose, I want to elaborate a bit on this conspiracy that is now rising in our midst like some long-forgotten terror that would have been best never discovered.

You can thank me later. Know that I had only your interests at heart, and that a cosmic truth is nothing compared to the nest that I have stirred up.

Ever the Harbinger of Harmony, my [fig leaf of peace](#) to the Diplomacy folks, surreal of a diplomatic overture as it was, appears to have proven to be insufficient to bring the glory seeking bastards of hard core Diplomacy to the table. Truly, for many, perhaps even for most, this would rightly be called mystifying! Even still, I have endured, and having unearthed their hardened archives of diplomatic doom, I feel that

the time to strike is while the iron is hot!

It's times like these that make me wish that I had my own theme song.

Now, where was I? Oh, yes, the archives. Those dreadful, musty, cobweb-covered archives. They go on, seemingly, without end.

All this time, they've been lying to us - to every last one of us! The joke has been on us, though, and it is a joke that no one is laughing at, now.

They have pranced and danced. They have paraded before us their endless procession of claims, regarding the esteemed object of their gaming affections.

That's right, I'm talking about Diplomacy.

See how it just rolls off the tongue? Do you think that that's by accident? Alamaze is the same damned way. It just rolls off the tongue.

But, the fickle Field Marshals of Diplomacy claim pedigree. They dare to claim pedigree, the bastards!

Better than us, they think. Oh, sure, seldom do they ever actually say it, but they don't have to say it. It just oozes from every pore of their hairy-hides diplomatized bodies.

Before any of them can silence me, though, I'm going to say just exactly what needs to be said - about Diplomacy, about them, about things that just roll off the tongue.

In fairness, though, I'm not going to call any of them out by name. Thus, the likes of Larry 'Peeriblah' Peery and Jim-Boob Burgess shall remain where they belong.

Besides, they are but mere infants in the larger game of subterfuge which underlies the grand scheme, whose tentacles slowly and methodically wrap about the entire gaming world.

Some of you, of course, may think that I've gone slap raving crazy. And, you have every right to feel that way, of course. You, after all, remain in the dark on the greater mysteries that interconnect all of the seemingly invisible dots.

Just call me the dot connector. Remember, you read it, here, first.

It's not about the money. It's not about the untold fortunes made from the trillions of Diplomacy zines that have been published down through the ages. I won't long harp on that.

But, how else do you think that Diplomacy rose to the fore of gaming, back in the day?

In earnest fairness, though, I wasn't the one who brought money up, first. The Diplomacy aristocracy has a long and storied history of distraction. You don't believe me?

I present to you, Exhibit A. Consider well the words of Diplomacy Zine Czar, C.F. von Metzke, speaking from his High Horse column in [Issue # 20](#) of the Diplomacy zine, Diplomacy World.

With a deft hand and the magic of a few words, Metzke focused the entire gaming world upon PBM gaming as where the real money lay.

"But with very rare exceptions, nobody makes money. The only professional gamesmaster in existence, Rick Loomis of Arizona, makes money, all right, but not from Diplomacy; it's his other offerings that keep him in beer; Diplomacy is (financially) a small-potatoes sideline. DIPLOMACY WORLD does indeed make a profit for me, I'll admit; I'd guess that my hourly wage for the work I do on this is seventy-three cents. Why, I could live on that for an entire year, provided that I died on Groundhog Day."

I won't even repeat what von Metzke said about Flagship editor, Nicky Palmer, in that same issue, as his words don't bear repeating here.

Their largely undocumented claims to boundless pedigree notwithstanding, there remains the issue of that rather sizable Starweb advertisement that adorned the pages of that very same issue of Diplomacy World. The evidence is there. It's a mystery in black and white. Old hands at Diplomacy know more than they are telling.

Somebody needs to get to the bottom of all this, and since none of the current rash of Diplomacy zines dare to give us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, preferring instead to

saturate the Internet with their hyper-selective detailing of gaming truth, it falls to us, here at Suspense & Decision, to fill that intentional void.

The purist strains of Diplomacy propaganda will admit of no failure on their part, to be certain. But, to allow the continued omission of Diplomacy's connection to a larger world of play by mail gaming would be nothing short of a travesty.

Before an avalanche of Peeriblah collapses on top of us all, however, and before the Diplomacy purists of convenience fire up the entire fleet of their propaganda zeppelins in retort, and before anyone out there reading this begins to doubt whether hard core Diplomacy enthusiasts have ever been mired in scandal, the doubting Thomases of the Diplomacy world would do well to recall the Great Pimley Scandal, and how it was exposed many years hence by yet another Diplomacy zine, this one appropriately named The Bolshevik Star.

There, in [Issue # 1](#) of that Diplomacy zine which speaks to us from the year 1973, we learn of what the editors of that zine described as a "pseudo-fascist, crypto-capitalistic rag," which as it turns out was yet another (what else?) Diplomacy zine. Crypto, indeed!

More than forty years ago, four decades, no less, the Diplomacy zines could not be trusted to give us the whole truth. Damn their hairy hides, every last one!

[TO BE CONTINUED]

PBM Activity Corner

News, Developments, & Bragging Rights

From Game Companies and Game Moderators

Flying Buffalo, Inc.

Flying Buffalo, Inc. will be attending the [Kubla Con](#) convention in San Francisco May 23-26, and the [Origins](#) convention in Columbus, Ohio June 11-15. If you are in town, stop by my booth and ask for your free Death Die (tm). (a D6 with a skull instead of the one spot). Also, make a \$10 or more purchase, and ask for your free PBM setup, and get a setup in your next game (a \$5 value) for free.

Rick Loomis

Takamo

The release of the free PBEM version of the original Takamo three months ago has gone well. We are adding several player empire every week. New players are joining and veteran Takamo players are showing up to rebuild their empires, renew old friendships and pursue old grudges. The cybernetic league that included the Charon Empire and the Knights of Rancor have been sited and the Kvizier, Fegg, Phantatwain and other members of the Grand Alliance have gone to a war footing.

Pirate and smuggler activity is already rampant in certain star sectors, while the trade, mining and agricultural corporations are working out agreements for placing installations and establishing

trade routes between colonies and terraformed planets. Although Nomads are rumored to be in the galaxy, no one has seen a planet warp into or out of existence as yet.

The Takamo Forum page has been reactivated to give players a place to converse, ask questions about game play and conduct diplomacy. The forum is on our main website at:

www.takamouniverse.com

Takamo Universe Development

Work continues in the pre-alpha phase of the project. Additional 3D model starships, such as the Briddarri 28 gun Brig and a huge fuel tanker, have just arrived. The first 300+ meter Metatank 3D model has come from the modelling shop, as well. Two new backup servers were purchased this week. Check out the Takamo Universe Site at:

www.takamouniverse.com

Like us on Facebook, Follow us on Twitter, and take a look at videos of in-game assets on the [Takamo Universe YouTube channel](#).

Harlequin Games

Harlequin Games are working hard on a brand new Legends module, Blood Tides

Rising. It is hoped that the full release to the players will be announced in the next issue of Suspense & Decision.

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

*** EDITOR'S NOTE**

Unfortunately, we didn't have many game companies to take advantage of the free space that was available to them in the PBM Activity Corner section for this month's issue.

A special thanks goes out to Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo, Inc., to Randy Ritnour of Kgruppe LLC, and to Dean Johnson of Harlequin Games for taking time out to submit something for us to include in the PBM Activity Corner for our May 2014 issue.

I decided to leave the rest of the space on this page blank. This chunk of empty space is brought to you courtesy of companies that had nothing to share with you, our readership.

PLAY

HYBORIAN WAR™

IMPERIAL CONQUEST IN THE AGE OF



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 assassinate 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

Next Generation PBM Gaming

Tribal Starfleet Trade Report #1

Bernd Jaehnigen

First, welcome to my new regular column here at S&D -- The **Tribal Starfleet Trade Report**. I have tried to submit something for every issue, so far, and now I am very happy to formalize this into an ongoing regular feature of the magazine. I am no moderator (though I did run something briefly, a long time ago). I am not a particularly good player (as Charles can tell you!) And while I have played in a fair number of PBM games over the years, I have come nowhere close to sampling all the different kinds and varieties -- not even many of the most important ones.

In other words, I am like most of you.

I love PBM games. I play as many as I can, though real life often hinders me to the point where I have missed turns and even dropped games. I think about my various positions, as I shop for groceries. I tense up with excitement, when a new turn comes out (or a new issue of this magazine!) I tinker with the idea of setting one up, someday. I dropped out of the hobby for a long time, as other priorities took hold and computer/internet gaming exploded. And, I have returned, because no other games have quite managed to give me the same thrill as PBM.

These are my credentials. As such, I wield them in an effort to represent the

thoughts and musings of every other PBMer out there. As this column progresses (and indeed, the magazine as a whole), please do be generous with your feedback. Positive, negative, tangential, superfluous -- it does not matter. What is important is that we all keep talking about our beloved hobby and keep the dream alive of great games, awesome moderators, an impressive magazine, and a vibrant community alive and well.

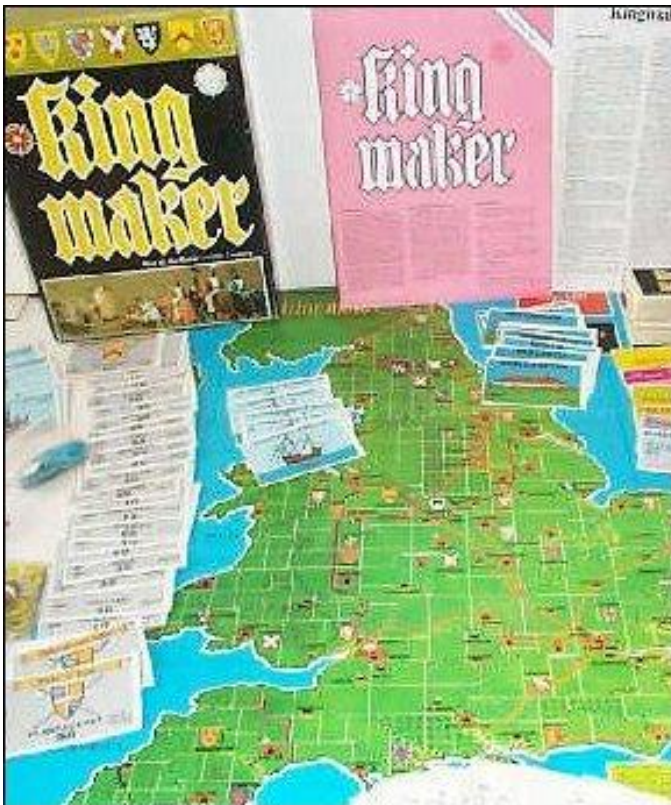
In the tradition of our editor-in-chief, I promise to respond, as best I can, to any and all responses to whatever I may write in this little corner of PBM. Having said that, let's get on with the first column, already...

Next Generation PBM Gaming...

PBM Gaming needs to evolve. PBM, itself, was the subject of prior evolutions in gaming, and it's time for another round. It is a law of nature that in a changing environment, those who do not evolve are doomed to extinction or irrelevance. And, while there are bright spots among many games out there, along with an inspiring rise in PBM-likes, there is still a fairly large segment of the hobby partying like it's 1989.

PBM gaming, itself, evolved out of the then-vibrant wargaming community. Wargames, themselves an evolution of chess and miniature-based Napoleonics, had fairly exploded on the scene. Avalon Hill was the early leader here, beginning with *Tactics II*, and then a long series of hugely successful games like *Blitzkrieg*, *Kingmaker*, *Gettysburg*, etc..

"Successful" should be qualified -- these weren't games that ordinary people played at parties and coffee shops. These were challenging games that required much more focused attention, strategic thinking, patience, and rules-scholarship to play. Sound familiar?



Those who were intrigued often found it frustrating to find opponents. Wargame clubs formed. Collections grew. The hobby advanced. It was always a

boutique experience -- the games were expensive and without broad appeal -- but, it was evolving and growing vigorously. One particularly energetic hotspot was *Diplomacy*, which Avalon Hill published. This game, more than any other at the time, fostered playing by mail and by fanzine. It was exceedingly difficult to find seven players to sit down at the same time for a game, and even more difficult to cram the inter-player diplomatic scrambling into a reasonable one-night time frame.

In 1963, John Boardman leveraged his experience publishing a science fiction fanzine ("Knowable") to carbon-copy fliers for *Diplomacy* games -- thus the first *Diplomacy* zine was born. D.I.Y. "dippy zines" sprouted like weeds over the rest of the decade, and continues as a prominent subculture, today. This also prompted Avalon Hill to start running ads for players in their house-organ magazine, *The General*. Players could now seek opponents for their favorite monster games.

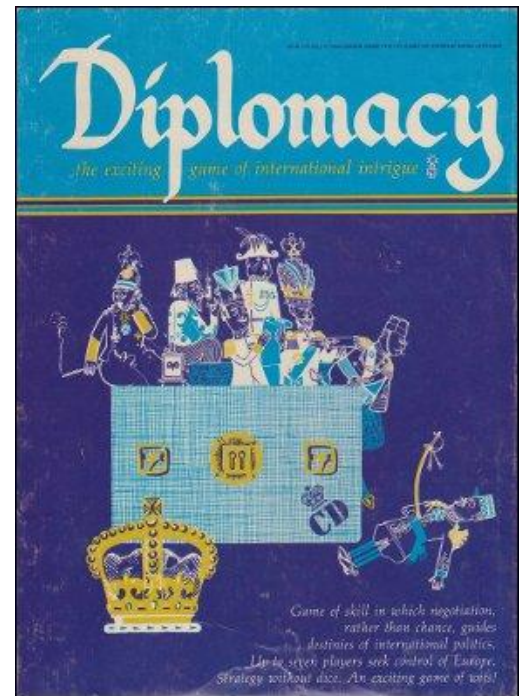
Chess and miniatures gave birth to wargames, which gave birth to *Diplomacy* and the earliest forms of PBM. A wonderful cascade of evolution.

Rick Loomis set up the first commercial PBM game company in 1970. Flying Buffalo is still running games, today, and has always been one of the main foundations for the genre. (As an aside, I have signed up for a special version of *Nuclear Destruction* -- along with some of you -- which was his first offering. I hope to write about that in a future column!) But he didn't run *Panzerblitz* and *Stalingrad* for one-on-one bouts or small groups. People were already doing that, themselves. Nor did he publish *Nuclear Destruction* as a table-top game (though he did publish many other table-top games, then and now.)

What he did, and what many consider to be the birth of our hobby, was DESIGN a game SPECIFICALLY to be played by mail. This was something new and different. It was also aimed at meeting pent up demand that nobody else knew existed, not even the staff of *The General*, which hosted those *Players Wanted* ads.

He started moderating games by hand, and soon had 200 paying customers, prompting him and a colleague to program a "computer" to handle the moderation. (This was not only a big evolutionary step, but it presaged the giant computer game industry we see, today. Even before the PC explosion, these were among the first multi-player computer gamers.) *Nuclear Destruction* supported more than just two players or two teams -- more than the seven in a *Diplomacy* game. The rules were simple, but the mechanics were somewhat

laborious, so by providing the service of moderating it, Loomis created and fed a community of players who wanted more than board games could give them.



Flying Buffalo followed up this initial success with a series of more advanced designs, including the venerable *Starweb*, still an industry mainstay. This inspired a flush of new PBM moderators and players – all very similar to the *Diplomacy* explosion ignited by Boardman seven years earlier. It also paralleled the (much larger) wildfire of role-playing games coming out of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The rest is history.

We are standing at a similar point in gaming history today.

Computer games in general, and the Internet in particular, have brought big transformations to the way people play, gather, and enjoy their free time. For years now, computer games have earned more money than Hollywood. And, while they form a large healthy market, I contend that there is pent-up demand for something more. And, I think PBM games can evolve and serve that niche.

Just as Loomis designed games for PBM (as opposed to wargames), we must design games to be played on today's mobile platforms. *Angry Birds* is fun, *Civilization* is addictive, *Half-Life* is downright cinematic, and *Mob Wars* tickles some of that primal PBM urge. But, nobody has really struck new gold here, yet. Nobody has created a really good mobile-based game that goes beyond a port of *Scrabble*, serves complex rules and/or strategy, supports large numbers of players, and lets them play asynchronously.

Nobody has yet designed a PBM game to be played on the iPhone.

I want a PBM-like game that I can check on throughout the day, that I can play against many people, perhaps even in a persistent large-scale universe, and that lets me submit turns at my convenience. I want it available across all my devices, including just plain old web pages. I want to be able to text a single order in

at a moment's notice, right when I think of it. I want to combine deep strategy with the intensity and anticipation of playing against humans, in some combination of asynchronous and real-time engagement. I want a clean and helpful graphic interface (and on that, lets give a nod to that *Phoenix* website!) I want full support for diplomacy, anonymity, and replay. And, I want at least some tactical play or order-generation to work through graphic controls, visual dashboards, or computer-game-like interaction.

To me, this would be an evolution not only of PBM games, but of mobile games. And, as with other forms of game evolution, our older cherished forms will continue to stick around. You can still find Diplomacy zines and play *Nuclear Destruction*. You can still buy *Squad Leader* and play chess, for that matter.

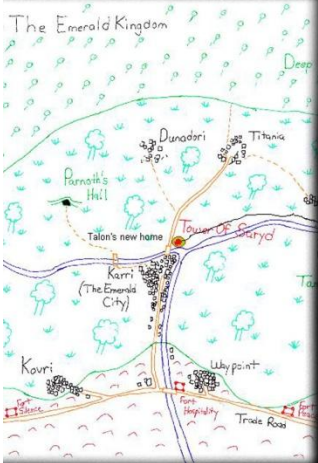
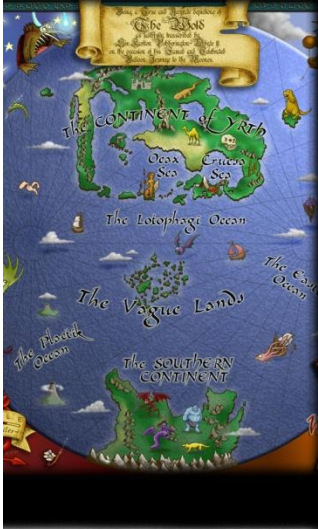
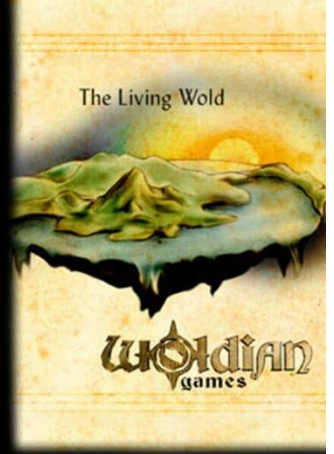
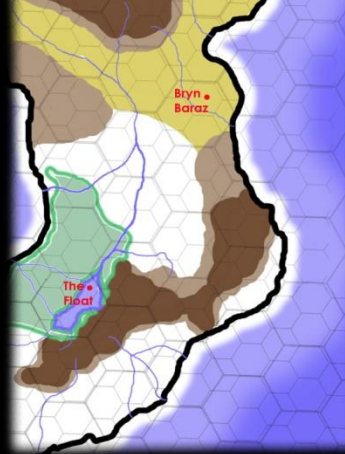
But the future goes to those who adapt.

Am I off my rocker? Send in your thoughts and let's continue this discussion in a future column!





Plateau City



762 Great Reasons To Try Woldiangames.com

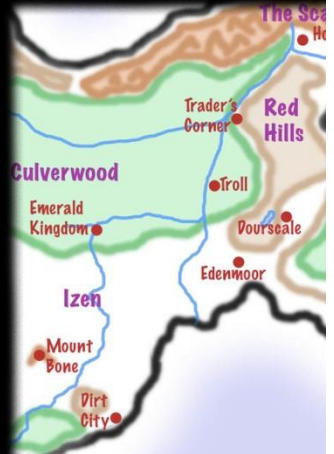
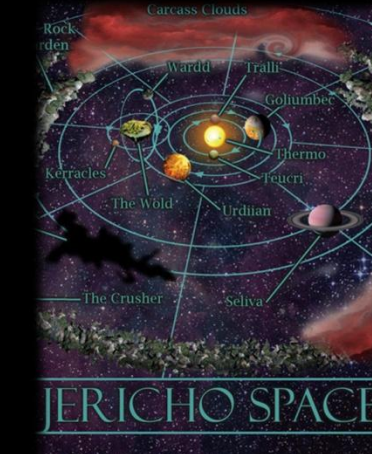
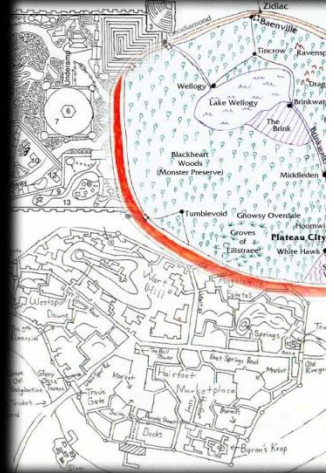
- Four unique character races.
- Two new base classes, 30 new prestige classes.
- Eight custom domains, 14 feats, 15 magic items.
- Two pantheons, 11 gods, 12 immortal powers.
- 11 planes replacing the standard D&D cosmology.
- A 571-page wiki full of campaign lore.
- 18 years of continuous play online 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!





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



Analyzing Progress

Weighing Our Magazine's Success and Failure

Charles Mosteller

So, where do I begin? This is Issue # 7, and we're already past the halfway point of the initial allocation of twelve issues that I committed to try and publish. This article, and future ones like it, will be an attempt to be candid about various things that I considered to be some of our successes and our failures, since setting out on this magazine journey.

Let's start with one of our successes.

I think that the fact that there is a PBM magazine in publication, once again, is a big success. I know that there's disagreement over what to call PBM, these days, and whether that term has become antiquated simply through the passage of time. However, I just don't think that there has been a real downside to there being a magazine with a heavy focus on play by mail gaming in regular publication.

People are reading it. People are looking forward to each new issue. Those are successes, also. We just don't know who all is reading it, each month, nor how many of each issues downloads are new people who actually care about PBM or any other form of gaming. And that, my friends, is one of our failures. Originally, to be honest with you, I didn't really care about bothering to even try and track our actual readership. The basic idea was to create the magazine, and grow

interest in the hobby of PBM gaming. By that, I mean both postal gaming and gaming with the ancestral descendants of play by mail games.

I look at what I feel are a lot of numbers. A lot is relative, certainly, but in any event, I certainly find myself looking at a lot more numbers than I actually care to look at. At times, I even share some of the numbers that I'm looking at. Why? For the very simple reason that at least some of our readers likely find statistical data pertaining to the magazine and to PBM companies to be interesting. Also, because it is in the interest of transparency.

The primary one that I need to convince that the magazine is making a difference that is, all things considered, a net positive, is myself. Accordingly, everyone else is free to look at any set of numbers presented anyway that they want to, but the bottom line for myself, however, is that I have no vested interest in looking at any of the numbers in such a way as to deceive or to mislead myself.

With regard to PBM companies and to the game companies that represent what I consider to be the ancestral descendants of play by mail gaming, for the most part, we are enjoying a certain degree of success. There is a perception that Suspense & Decision magazine has

value and merit, although how much merit and how much value are still pretty much up in the air.

I think that it's safe to say that the magazine is a nostalgic boon, where PBM gaming is concerned, but when it comes to translating into a viable mechanism for converting readers into paying customers, there is, at best, only anecdotal evidence, thus far, that the magazine is capable of growing the player base of the industry to a notable degree.

Whatever progress that the magazine has made in this area, and whatever actual successes that it has enjoyed, thus far, have been limited.

From my perspective, however, there are numerous factors that need to be taken into account, where player growth industry-wide is concerned. The focus of this article, however, is the magazine, itself, and the successes and failures, thereof.

Back when I started this project, my initial thoughts were that British PBM companies were far and away more likely to exploit the value of the opportunity presented by a new PBM magazine arriving on the scene. However, the last several issues have led me to conclude that my initial thinking was wrong - with the exception of KJC Games, which for whatever reason, I didn't feel would be amongst the most interested of the remaining British PBM companies in a new PBM magazine coming into existence.

Yet, as it turned out, KJC Games was an early supporter of our efforts, and they continue to demonstrate keen interest in the magazine being successful.

If I were to judge the British PBM industry as a whole, insofar as how successful that the magazine has been at engaging that segment of the overall PBM industry, then I would adjudge our efforts to have largely been a failure, to date.

With regard to Harlequin Games, our success has been modest, at best. After a lengthy delay, Harlequin finally did submit an ad. Back when I first started this undertaking, if you had asked me which PBM company that I thought would be the first to engage with us and to support our efforts, I would have said Harlequin Games, without hesitation.

Yet, things didn't quite turn out that way. Limited ads, and no articles, tilt things to the failing side of the equation, where this analysis is concerned.

Our biggest failure on the British PBM scene has, without question, been with Madhouse. In all fairness, I know that Steve over at Madhouse is very involved with politics, these days, but in trying to assess areas where the magazine has either been successful or failed, with Madhouse we have failed, without question.

There have been no ads and no articles to emanate from Madhouse that have appeared in this magazine in seven issues, to date, now. That, by any

measure, qualifies as failure in my book. Understand, this isn't an assessment of Madhouse or any other PBM company, but rather, only an assessment of Suspense & Decision magazine.

Although I really have no idea how many players that Jason Oates Games has, I've always considered it to be a small PBM company. It's a British PBM company, as far as I know, though.

When I visit their website, I encounter the most visible signal, out of all websites that I visit, that someone in the British Isles supports our magazine having come into existence. If anyone flies the Suspense & Decision flag, it's Jason Oates. That qualifies as a genuine success, to me.

But, if you asked me how many readers of our magazine have begun playing Jason's games, I don't know what the answer to that would be, or whether any have, in fact.

And, you see, that's part of the problem. Not with Jason, per se, but with PBM companies, in general. I don't know what the actual number of players are, currently. I really don't think that anyone does.

Individual companies know what their own player numbers are, of course, and some may consider their player numbers to be some kind of trade secret. In the old days, PBM companies typically and frequently would brag about how many players that their games had. These days, it many times seems as if PBM

companies are ashamed for people to learn just how badly that the PBM player base has deteriorated.

It really hasn't been a goal or a priority, thus far, for the magazine to glean those numbers from the various game companies in question. Even still, I'm going to chalk this area up as a failure for the magazine, and for all that I know, it may always remain a failure.

One thing that I look for, as a part of my efforts at publishing this magazine, is life - signs of life, to be more specific. If hundreds of people are playing a particular game, then I am inclined to believe that I should find evidence of that somewhere online, in today's day and age.

Where Agema, another British PBM company, is concerned, over the course of our magazine's publication run, to date, we have received ads to run, but no articles. But, there's mention of us in their forum, and links to download the various issues of Suspense & Decision posted there. With Agema, I think that we've enjoyed a moderate degree of success.

The Battle for Britain continues, of course. Perhaps this is our finest hour, and we don't even know it, yet. But, for now, at least, things aren't looking so good for our efforts in the Old World. The Lidless Eye of Failure glares unceasingly at us, reminding me with each issue published just how far we have yet to go, in order to cross what can only be characterized as a Great Divide.

The ad from Middle-earth Games is a glimmer of hope. It's faint, gazing at it from the other side of the Atlantic Pond. Even still, it paints a bright speck on an otherwise foreboding picture.

But, what about here on the American side of the Atlantic Pond?

Over a span of the last several years, I have come to view the Big Three of American PBM companies to be Flying Buffalo, Inc., Reality Simulations, Inc., and Rolling Thunder Games.

Others may view things quite differently, of course, but that's the view from my perspective.

I am going to chalk up our efforts with Rick Loomis and Flying Buffalo to have largely been a success, to date. On the PBM Activity Corner, Loomis leads the way. He has submitted photographs for publication in our magazine, and he has allowed us to run various ads for Flying Buffalo Games (Starweb, Heroic Fantasy, and Nuclear War). He's also been one of the best, thus far, at providing me feedback, where PBM moderators are concerned.

That's not to say that he necessarily agrees with everything that I write for the magazine, but he at least demonstrates actual - and sustained - interest in the magazine. When I started this venture, if I would have had to have guessed, then I would likely have figured that Flying Buffalo would be the hardest of PBM nuts to crack. That just goes to show how much that I know.

Though he has not authored any articles for Suspense & Decision, yet, nonetheless, he has offered up advice. I just need to figure out how to keep it all interesting.

Where Rolling Thunder is concerned, I will readily admit that we have made no progress, whatsoever. No ads. No articles. Precious little in the way of communication.

Of course, in all fairness, PBM moderators on both sides of the Atlantic tend to maintain fairly busy lives. Whatever time and energy that they focus on things PBM related, they have to pick and choose where to focus their efforts and their energies.

But, that's just it. Without their energy and effort, Suspense & Decision remains all the poorer for their absence from our pages. Yet, it remains the reality in which we currently operate. To not have that energy and effort visible within our pages is an indicator of failure on our part, not success. Analysis requires objectivity, if it is to be of any use to us in our march forward.

What about Reality Simulations? I am going to characterize our efforts with Lee Kline and RSI as successful. The fact that Lee does respond to my e-mails, and that she has sent me images to use as advertisements within our magazine, and that she has given me the OK to incorporate game-related imagery into our articles and ads has been a big plus for our magazine, in my book. Yet, she's eternally busy - as so many are.

None of us seem to have enough time to get as meaningfully involved, as we might otherwise perhaps would like to. I count myself in that number, as well. The magazine suffers from what relatively little time and effort that I am able to devote to it.

Fortunately, Rick McDowell and Enlightened Age Entertainment, Inc. have ridden to the rescue. Rick and I met in a PBM Design Group on Yahoo!, if memory serves me correctly - a discussion group that some damned fool deleted, at some point in the past. Confound their hide!

Rick has gifted our magazine and its readership with numerous articles, and he has provided a lot of feedback - both positive and negative.

His game, Alamaze, which is an electronic ancestral descendant of his original PBM game of the same name, is probably the brightest star on the PBM horizon, right now.

Rick McDowell's early engagement with our magazine project was rivalled only by Mica Goldstone of KJC Games. He remains engaged, even still, after our journey of seven issues, from where we started to where we are, right now, in our journey to wherever it is that we are going.

An advocate of a better quality magazine, even at the risk of it being much shorter in length, Rick McDowell has proven willing to keep his boot on my editorial throat. He provides me

feedback from his perspective as a game moderator, but no less importantly, he also provides me feedback on Suspense & Decision from his perspective as a reader.

His criticism is rivalled in its quality only by Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo. All things considered, I probably do receive more praise than criticism, where Suspense & Decision is concerned. But, in earnest truth, I could certainly use more feedback of the criticism variety.

Not because I am a glutton for punishment, but rather, because the things that we do right are not the problem. The core problem invariably is what it has always been - the things that we don't get right.

Bob McLain weighed in early on with some very sensible advice. Unfortunately, Bob has fallen silent, of late, probably in pursuit of selling books that he authors. With regard to publishing this PBM magazine for the 21st Century, Bob McLain advocated that I follow Nicky Palmer's example.

Unfortunately, I don't have enough copies of Flagship magazine during Nick Palmer's run as editor to be able to do that, I don't think. Besides, I fear that I have forever been influenced by David Webber's approach to publishing a PBM magazine - namely, Paper Mayhem - too much, in order to follow Bob's rather soundly stated advice.

Bob McLain reading Suspense & Decision when it was brand new, now that's

definitely going to qualify as a success, in my book. But, the fact that I have heard nothing but silence from Bob for so long, now, echoes a reverberation of failure. Like many others, though, Bob may just be busy with all sorts of McLainish things.

With regard to how our magazine is doing, at engaging the various segments of the currently active PBM Hivemind, ours has truly been a mixed record, to date. Our biggest successes have not been with the biggest concentrations of PBM players.

Where we have been successful, however, is at rebuilding the middle class of play by mail gaming. But, even still, we remain very early in this particular undertaking.

In the old days (previous years of the PlayByMail.Net forum), we tended to enjoy only sparse and intermittent forum traffic. Of late, though, we have been enjoying new forum registrations from individuals with a genuine interest in PBM games.

More importantly, forum postings have begun to pick up, noticeably, and this serves to generate even more interest from forum passers-by who happen along, now and then.

Of course, in all fairness, many of our newest forum users at PlayByMail.Net have originated from the Takamo community of players. The Big Three of American PBM companies, if I count ancestral descendants amongst their

numbers, translates into Enlightened Age Entertainment making the Big Three into a Big Four (due to Alamaze, not Fall of Rome), while Takamo turns the Big Four into a Big Five.

Not having access to all of the player numbers for the various companies in question, trying to discern who is big from who is not is a challenge of considerable size, in and of itself.

But, with regard to Suspense & Decision magazine, and who out there is engaging with the magazine, there seems to me to be more momentum with American game companies than with British ones.

Randy Ritnour has one of what I feel to be the more promising post-PBM games coming down the pike - Takamo Universe. While the free game of the original version of Takamo that I am struggling to grasp continues to kick my ass, I continue to eye Takamo Universe like a kid in a candy shop. There's no game more on my personal PBM radar than this one.

The Takamo folks seem to grasp that Suspense & Decision magazine has value. They link to the PlayByMail.Net site. They spread word about our magazine's existence. A sizable segment of their community of players has seemingly merged with the PlayByMail.Net forum. If there is synergy, anywhere, it's with the Takamo folk. The Alamaze community is far more active, comparing the two, but the Takamo players are building a true sense of community elsewhere - namely, on

the PlayByMail.Net forum. This, I think, is one of the brightest success stories, but I'm not sure how much of this particular success is due to the magazine, itself. I count Takamo as one of our brightest successes, thus far.

Then, there's Talisman Games. Davin Church and Genny White were immediately receptive to Suspense & Decision. Their game on my PBM radar at the moment is Galac-Tac. This is a game with deep PBM roots. I've already experimented with it, a little - but that's another story for another day. The real story, with Talisman Games, is that they constitute yet another piece of the PBM puzzle that was previously missing.

They also constitute one of our successes, as a magazine. I have a positive feeling about Talisman Games. Davin and Genny are engaged. Both have submitted articles to the magazine. Galac-Tac ads have been sent in, as well. In early e-mail exchanges with Genny, her enthusiasm about her past experiences with playing Galac-Tac was palpable. Not persuading her to write more articles for our magazine is, in my considered opinion, one of our magazine's biggest failures, to date.

Between Genny of Talisman Games, Amber of Skeletal Software/PhoenixBSE, and Shannon Muir of PBM fame of old, I think that our magazine has been fairly successful at persuading gamers of the female persuasion to share some of their thoughts about PBM gaming. Our readership, though, likely remains male-

dominated. I have no hard figures to attribute that to, only gut instinct.

Where people who are new to PBM gaming are concerned, though, I think that our magazine is failing NOOBs on a level that approaches disaster. A recent communication that I received from a player that prefers to not be quoted persuades me of the necessity to redouble our magazine's efforts, as they relate to facilitating the transitioning of the unaccustomed into full fledged players of the PBM persuasion. This, I suspect, factors into another failure of ours, the weak performance on acting as a catalyst for generating new players for current PBM games of a sizable quantity.

Currently, Suspense & Decision seems to be generating only a trickle of new players for PBM games, and even for games that are ancestral descendants of PBM games. Of course, there are probably numerous different things that factor into the equation, where rebuilding the overall PBM player base is concerned.

On the blogosphere scene, the blogosphere was one of our earliest - and most important - successes. Of late, though, our magazine seems to have slowed down a bit, as far as generating interest across the blogosphere. It's not a confession that I want to admit to, but striving to be objective in analyzing how we are doing, it is a confession that rings true in my ears, at the current moment in time.

At the moment, I remain persuaded that the blogosphere remains our best route for growing the overall PBM player base, for the foreseeable future. The blogosphere is disproportional, and in a positive way, in its overall impact on the growth of our magazine's readership. If I may be so blunt, I honestly do think that the blogosphere is one of the true lynchpins for driving future PBM growth.

Our experience with the blogosphere, to date, has been one of our great successes, compared to all of our other successes of various sizes and shapes. But, of late, we seem to have lost a little steam, as we wind our way onto new blogs at an incremental level. Whether we can regain steam or not, on the blogosphere end of things, remains an outstanding question going forward.

With regard to advertising, what I am finding is that other gaming sectors seem to have a far better appreciation for the value of advertising than the PBM sector. By and large, PBM companies as a whole seem to have pretty much given up on trying to convert individuals into PBM gamers, via advertising. What their viable Plan B is, however, remains one of the great mysteries of the gaming world.

For the most part, the advertising engines of PBM games that thrived in years now past are pretty much dead or rusted. The willingness of other sectors of the gaming world to not just advertise, but to advertise so readily once our magazine has been brought to their attention, is a boon sent from the

proverbial gods. If PBM companies either can't - or won't - create ads to advertise their remaining stables of games, then I won't hesitate to look elsewhere for individuals and companies that are both eager and willing to advertise gaming products and services which hold the possibility to instill our magazine with elements of visual interest.

Suspense & Decision has enjoyed success, with regard to acquiring more of an international character.

There is a forum thread on the PlayByMail.Net forum, one where site users are invited to announce where they hail from. The postings, there, are one indicator of our overall audience, but of more recent vintage is the PlayByMail.Net Facebook page.

Speaking of which, our Facebook page doesn't currently enjoy a large number of likes, but the cross-section of those who have liked our page, to date, is very encouraging.

This article isn't an attempt to touch upon everything or upon every game or every individual that we view to be a success or a failure, as far as our magazine goes.

It is, however, an attempt to start the process of analysis, so that we might better determine what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. The initial goal is to publish twelve issues. We are over halfway to that objective, now. The future of the magazine hangs in the balance.

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.

Interstellar Cluster Wars

Interstellar Cluster Wars is a game of Exploration, Colonization and Conquest. Planning and management skills, along with strategy & tactics, become ever more valuable as the game progresses. As other Players are encountered, diplomacy becomes an additional requirement.

In this roughly bimonthly computer-generated turn driven game, you are given control of a habitable world, along with its various population types and all of its manufacturing, and research facilities. As a sole planetary ruler, you will write its

orders/instructions electronically and they will be fully carried out as other rulers in various corners of the cluster are doing the same.

As supreme ruler, you will lead your home world, along with the population and production that you control, through a period of accelerating economic and industrial development and expansion. This era of growth and technological advances will quickly fuel the need for interstellar exploration and colonization. Voyaging into deeper space, establishing your mining bases and projecting a

military presence, you will continue to expand into the neighboring star systems where you eventually will encounter other space faring civilizations. Ultimately it is in this interstellar arena that you and the other emerging alien

empires will struggle for economic control and military supremacy. Strategy, Military tactics, Machiavellian alliances (or perhaps just plain brute force), will eventually yield a sole dominant power.

Join The Game?

- * We are currently running our second play test game.**
- * More games will be started as we progress thru the project.**
- * All test games are currently free.**

If you would like to play, send Email to:

vholford@roadrunner.com

Interstellar Cluster Wars

Where We're Heading...

Houston, we are at T plus seven, seeking rendezvous with destiny.

Our mission - what is it?

That's a question that seemingly gets more difficult to answer, with each issue that we publish.

Not so much because we don't know where we're headed, but because where we're headed doesn't even exist, yet.

It is complicated by the fact that, to be quite honest with you, I'm not even sure where it is that we are, on the map of PBM gaming. All sensors seem to indicate to me that, while the journey may seem a trek through familiar territory, territory discovered long ago by our PBM magazine ancestors, the truth of the matter is that we are in territory that is, for all intents and purposes, uncharted. Are we lost in space?

The way is always clear. We're headed forward, always forward. There's no turning back. Our speed is increasing. An entire universe of interest awaits us - if we can but remain intact, long enough.

This vessel takes damage, as we proceed. Necessity dictates that we improvise. Our charts, such precious few that we have, are all out of date. Thus, we turn to interest and to feedback by which we shall steer this ship of state to open waters.

Going forward, we will begin to make Noobs (that's right, the uninitiated) a focus of our core efforts. Dedicated columns, dedicated sections of material, all aimed at the newbie to PBM gaming, rather than the veteran PBM player.

For all of the pages that

we churn out, we are not doing worth a darn at presenting the proverbial macro game to our readers.

We need more pages encompassing more details. In a nutshell, what shall be required are articles of vastly greater depth, articles that pore over the details that go through PBM gamers' minds, as they go through not just a single turn, but entire games.

How we are going to accomplish this with our current magazine staff and current demands upon our available time, I honestly do not know. But, while uncertainty may block our view, it shall not form a solid obstacle to our resolve.

I believe it to be imperative that our magazine become more accomplished at entertaining our

readership. Toward this end, it needs more humor and more fiction.

Ultimately, the magazine will continue to evolve and sprout branches of interests. To be relevant to gamers, Suspense & Decision must become something that more gamers can relate to.

Not on the level of becoming a more general interest gaming magazine, either. No, what I am thinking about is more along the lines of becoming something that they can relate to on a more personal level.

Photographs of people who actually play such games, and of individuals who are integral to the hobby, these provide points of visual interest.

Real people playing real games. That's what I'm thinking about.

But, since the vast bulk of the pages of this magazine are occupied by text, a greater effort must be made to bring that text alive. Articles of depth, with more and more details animated by

a passion for the subject matter under discussion.

The true champions of gaming are not so much those who win individual games, nor even those who claim victory at tournaments and conventions.

Rather, the true champions of gaming are those who allow others to live the experience of playing a game vicariously through the tales and stories that they share.

Bonding. Camaraderie. Esprit de corps.

God only knows that I can't accomplish all this by myself. I am going to need help. I am going to require the services of others - the services of yourself, perhaps.

We need more tidbits and morsels of commentary. Narrative tells the story, but it is the small details that cement the big picture into place.

A thousand tepid souls who hold their silence as if it were sacred are worthless in this

undertaking. What I wouldn't give for a single soul willing to pour themselves into sharing their love of gaming, that others might catch but a mere scent of such passion that lights the gaming world afire.

The magazine could stand to do with some more art, of course.

The irony of it all is that, no matter what I undertake to do, no matter what I strive to achieve or manage to accomplish, our mission will likely always remain just out of reach.

The next five issues will likely visit a multitude of changes upon this magazine. Hopefully, they will prove to be changes for the best.

It all boils down to publishing a magazine that people value enough to make it a regular part of their respective lives.

Something that they look forward to receiving, each time that a new issue is published.

Something of value.

OLYMPIA

G4

What is Olympia exactly?

- a pbem (Play By EMail), so you only need email
- a highly addictive social game
- a turn based strategy game set in a fantasy magical world
- a multiplayer game (50 - 200+ players)

How does it compare other similar games?

- it's open ended with no real victory conditions beyond what you set yourself.
- no solo win, game long alliances are the norm
- no hex map
- complex but therefore interesting timing system (movement and battles)
- the diplomacy is usually at alliance level
- 30 days of possibilities, no long or short turn orders, making outcome of the orders less predictable
- you have less units. 10-18 nobles with 1 key noble
- no races but lots of beasts
- the resource harvesting is pretty basic (nothing dynamic) - you can choose what you do: explore, produce, manage your holdings, build your empire, diplomacy, coordinate with allies, trade, mercenary, mage for hire, thief or just conquer.

What's so special about Olympia then?

- as you have less units and you invest more in them on a long term.
- one person's units can be very effective.
- you get attached to your nobles because they are characters!
- it permits more flavour and role-play.
- less micromanagement because you don't have to manage 100-1000 units.
- the timing is complex but it adds more tactical decisions in 1 turn, and that's what strategy games are about.
- you have a lot of variety in magic, you are free to choose your schools which can stack.
- the same applies to skills, a lot of variety and it all can stack.
- this means you don't have to specialize your faction.
- the map is very interesting, you have the surface world with locations and (hidden) sub locations as well as Hades, faery, the tunnels and the cloudlands.

*** It's open ended after all, so everyone will find their fun in this game.**

*** If you want to join, send an email to tom.droeshout@gmail.com, so we can add you to the game.**

*** The turns run once a week.**

*** The game is open source and free**

*** Olympia game G4 is on turn 21, with 137 players currently still active.**

<http://www.shadowlandgames.com/olympia/>

REGIME

change!



ACEMA



KJC GAMES
presents

CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT

QUITE SIMPLY MAKES IT

AHEAD OF THE GAME.

phoenix

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

<http://www.phoenixbse.com>

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

READER SURVEY

1. What was your favorite article from this issue, and why?
2. What author do you want to read more articles from?
3. What game do you want to read more about?
4. On a scale of 0-to-10 (10 being best), rate this issue's front cover.
5. Of our issues published, to date, which issue of Suspense & Decision magazine has been your favorite, and why?



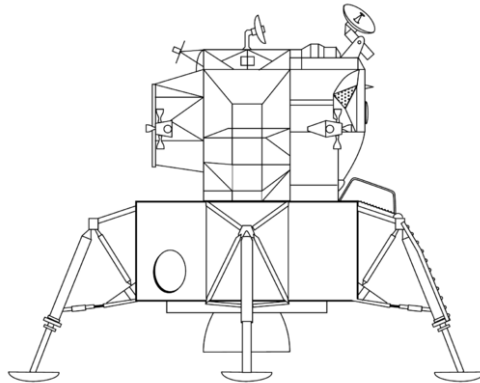
Send your Reader Survey responses for this issue to:

GrimFinger@GrimFinger.Net

DON'T DELAY - RESPOND NOW!!

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

Charles Mosteller



The Road of Kings

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

Here lies one of the greatest bastions of PBM gamers that the world has ever known!

Long has it been, since I last visited its hallowed halls. It remains intact. It is populated by the play by mail faithful. Search no further, if it is Valhalla that you seek, for Lloyd Barron has preserved a great realm for PBM gamers to gather at.

But, be forewarned! To venture beyond the gates to this capital of PBM gaming, it is required of you by the powers that be there that you register, first - 'ere you proceed to what it, indeed, a veritable Promised Land of PBM gamers gathered together for God only knows what purpose.

Here walk the elite of Hyborian War, Reality Simulation's take on Imperial

Conquest in the Age of Conan. Do not enter its gates, lightly - for other men have done so, and have gotten lost in its seemingly endless catacombs of forum discussion threads. Much advice for playing Hyborian War can be found here, both day and night. A hefty collection of Hyborian War Kingdom Spotlights adorn its vaults of player-contributed material.

Here is where you come, to experience PBM gaming taken to the next level. Here, a sense of true community thrived - nay, brotherhood, I say!

Visit, and drink of the robust vigor of play by mail gaming of years now past.

CONCLUSION: To visit this place is to know that play by mail gaming is not dead. If it is certainty that you see, of such a thing, then there is no reason to take my word for it. Venture forth, for yourself, and experience this thriving civilization of play by mail gaming.

Truly, this is THE Road of Kings!

Lost in the Gaming Wilderness? Searching for a game to play?? **DON'T GIVE UP HOPE!!**

And God said, Let there be Play By Mail, that mail might be good. And God saw that it was good.

And the evening and the morning were the eighth day.

And God said, Let PBM bring forth creatures after its own kind, games and Game Moderators and Players to play the games.

And God saw it, and it was good.

And the evening and the morning were the ninth day.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the envelopes with stamps, that turn orders and turn results should flow both day and night.

And God said, Let there be a PBM list, that players should be able to find the game of their liking.

And the evening and the morning were the tenth day.

Greg Lindahl's

The PBM List

