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ISSUE 1

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REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

Why? What? When? Who?

WHY? FLAGSHIP has been launched because the Play-By-Mail hobby needs a reliable and entertaining guide through the multiplying forests of PBM games on the market. If any one of us tries to play them all we will end up spending a fortune, sometimes for an ill-conceived game which extracts money from its players for a few turns before expiring with a sigh, sometimes for more popular games which don't happen to suit our individual tastes. On the other hand, if we only play one or two games we may be missing something great! FLAGSHIP will sort out the sheep from the goats, and keep you in touch with the latest developments. We also want to bring together players from the professional and amateur wings of PBM, who today seem to have very little contact with each other.

WHAT? We will normally have seven main sections:

PROFESSIONAL SECRETS are the feature articles, analysing the games and holding forth on novel strategies and insights. Since not every reader will know the game, an introductory piece will summarize the rules in a separate box, so readers who do know it can get on to the main course without delay.

EXPLORER'S FINDINGS are straightforward reviews, mostly of new and less-known games, as well as comparisons between different games to show the advantages and drawbacks of each.

GHOST IN THE MACHINE is our workshop section, open to actual and would-be game designers to debate the tricks of the trade and tell you how to get started on your own game.

THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK is a column available to the PBM GMs to tell us their current plans for new games and report on the progress of existing ones.

THE MIGHTY PEN is *your* column, where we will print feedback, abuse, compliments (if we get any), and player advertisements in any PBM game.

TRAVELLERS' TALES is reserved for game-based fiction. This issue's story is based on **TRIBES OF CRANE**; expect a wide variety of game locales in coming issues.

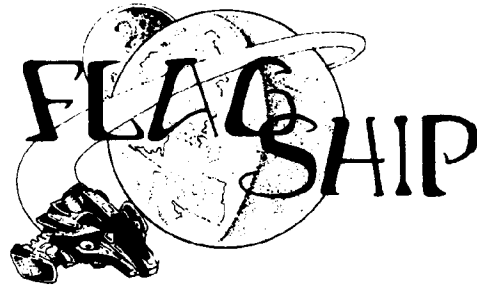
GALACTIC VIEW surveys the hobby and tells you where to find each game.

WHEN? Quarterly.

WHO? I'm the former editor of the general games magazine *The Gamer* and author of two books on board wargames; I've played in perhaps three quarters of the PBM games now on the market. The initial contributors are from many parts of the hobby, but in future I hope that *you* will want to contribute to broaden our scope still further. In particular, we want to have a strong base of contributors on both sides of the Atlantic so we can review all the new games as they come out. A great number of games are played in both the USA and the UK, but some, such as *Empyrean Challenge* and *Fleet Maneuvers* in the US and *Vorcon Wars*, *Keys of Bled* and *Crasimoff's World* in the UK, are little known outside their home countries. We want FLAGSHIP to be the real coordinating point for the hobby: why should you miss out on a good game just because it's GMed in another country? We will give examples of games in individual countries (e.g. the *Universe* star map, to show you the typical pattern of this game), but we aim to be genuinely international in both coverage and spirit. And to those purists who are getting ready to write and complain about foreign spelling - we'll print the article in the spelling of the author's country!

We're proud of this first issue: the first-ever deep analysis by a Starlord Emperor; a look into 25000-point *Starweb*; a... well, why talk about it, when you can turn the page and start reading for yourself?

NICKY PALMER



No. 1

Winter 1983

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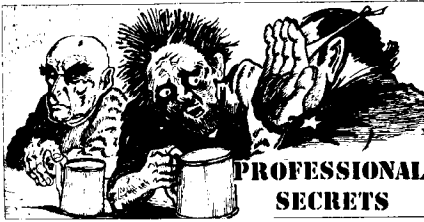
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STARLORD pits up to 50 players against the first to seize the Empry – LEE SIMPSON gives us

THE

VIEW FROM THE THRONE

I BECAME the First Emperor of Starlord 10 on turn 12 although my first attack on the Throne Star was actually on turn 4. I was fortunate enough to find myself with a base surrounded by three cities, a number of new stars and, most opportune, a key star. My first move was to the key star which revealed that the Throne was a mere fourteen astrals to my east.

Now I knew that in earlier games Emperors had first come to power around turns 6 or 7 and this before the new rules for battle stars were adopted, allowing a quadrupling rather than a doubling of a player's main assault strength. On this basis I reasoned that my next three moves – first to a city in range of the hub, then to a battle star inside the hub and then an all-out attack on the Throne – would give me a largely intact Empry in record-breaking time.

As Mike Singleton has since admitted, in earlier Starlord games the Throne Star was initially too lightly garrisoned. He rectified this in time for me to see my entire quadrupled fleet of 126 starships annihilated and I only remained in the game because another player's orders, which included taking my retreat star, failed to meet the deadline.

STARLORD – RULES SUMMARY

Up to 50-player game. You are a Starlord controlling one Base Star in a galaxy of 1000 stars (differently distributed in each game). At the start of the game, the 950 stars not controlled by players are owned by the Empry, with up to ten ships at each and several hundred at the central Throne Star. Sadly, the last Emperor has died, and the Empry is being run by imperial computers which do little but vary the defensive orders for the garrisons.

It occurs to you, and to the 49 others, that this opens up a vacancy, and indeed the first player to win the Throne will gain control of the Empry and all its forces, as well as getting a 25 square foot multi-coloured map of the Galaxy, as well as getting all turns free as long as he remains Emperor. The snag is that he will acquire up to 49 enemies.

Movement is normally to any stars within a short range (seven 'astrals') of your Command Ship; forces under your control but not within range remain as garrisons awaiting your next visit. Combat is by a secret formula which appears to give the defender a slight edge, but it is very strongly affected by the interaction of battle tactics. Each of your attacking and

So at the start of turn 5 my mobile fleet consisted of 8 starships. Nevertheless, I was able to return to my base area, bide my time converting a couple of new stars into cities, grab a couple of cities from another player and seven turns later make a successful attack on the Throne Star, just pipping two other players to the prize.

BECOMING THE FIRST EMPEROR

The most important objective for every player in a new game must be to become the First Emperor. Experience shows that the First Emperors become very powerful and are very difficult to topple. However, a headlong dive at the hub is now no longer good enough. You must first cultivate sufficient strength to be able to capture a heavily garrisoned Throne Star.

Players who begin with a base close to the Throne remain those with the best chance of becoming the First Emperor. In Starlord 12 I began with a base 40 astrals distant from the Throne Star and after what I feel was a fairly efficient exercise in building my strength and travelling to the hub, calculated that I could take the Throne Star on turn 16. This was four turns too late.

Once the First Emperor comes to power

defending forces can choose a tactic from Probe (retreat if more than 10% of the force would otherwise be lost) to Attack (fight to the last ship). A hard-pressed Starlord may be forced to behave predictably, e.g. attacking a vital star, enabling his opponent to choose a suitable tactic to counter him. With large forces, the interactive effect becomes very important indeed.

Star types vary – there are 14 types in all – providing fuel, data on surrounding stars, combat advantages, information on the location of the Throne, and many more features. Long-distance jumps by fleets (normally allowed only for Command Ships alone) are possible between Gate and Exit stars, the problem being that you probably don't know how to get back from the Exit.

All reports 100% computerized, with multi-colour printouts. The game continues indefinitely until one player achieves total domination, an event which has never yet occurred.

This article is the first detailed analysis by a successful Emperor ever to appear in print. The references to *Interim* are to Mike Singleton's house magazine for the game (see Galactic View for address).

players have to reconsider their strategy, although there is one overriding rule. The Emperor is at his weakest immediately upon assuming the Throne. Give him a few turns to consolidate and he becomes very powerful but if you are in a position to hit him hard and continuously then you might topple him. In Starlord 12 the First Emperor lasted all of three turns and the Second Emperor is relatively weak and in a fairly desperate position. This makes for a very interesting game.

REMAINING EMPEROR

In Starlord 10 the two devices I developed, largely to survive the early turns, were the 'Imperial Zone' and the 'Satrapies'.

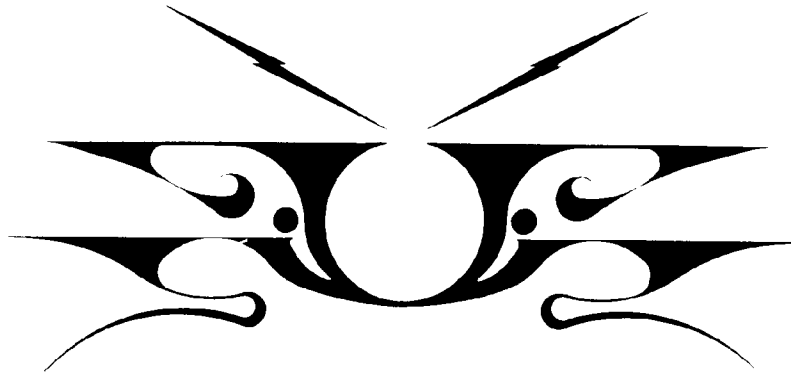
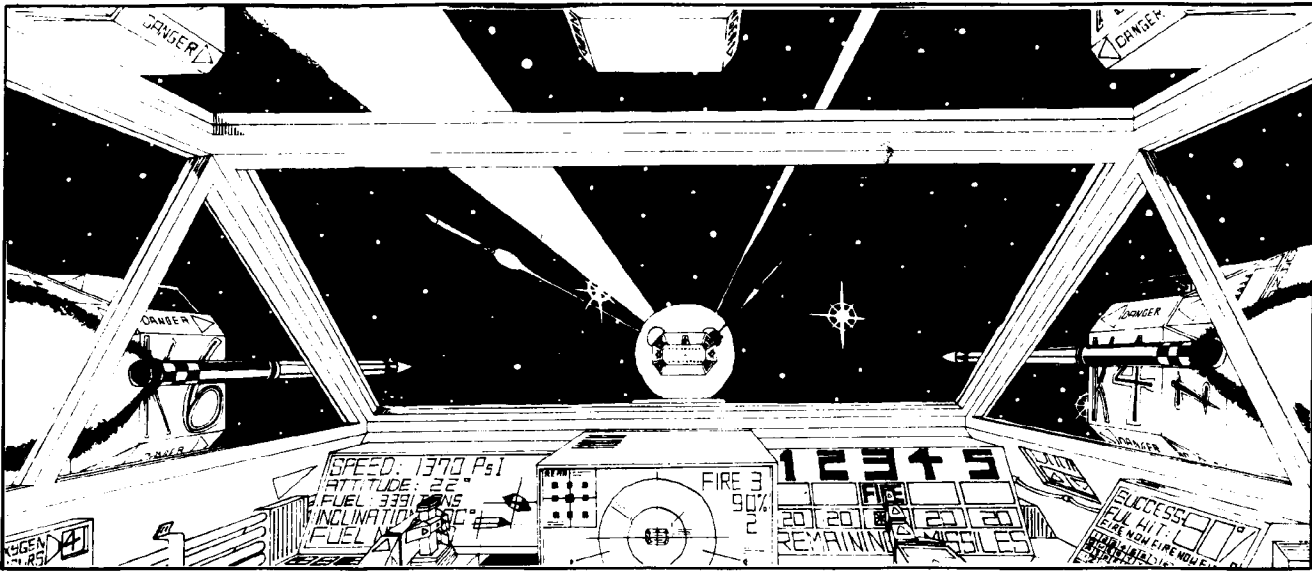
At the time of my ascension the Falklands War was well under way and the 200-mile Total Exclusion Zone seemed just the ticket. I thus defined a circular total exclusion zone around the Throne Star and have heavily publicised its borders and the penalty for their violation. Thus just about every player in the game is aware of my borders and would have to make a conscious decision to incur war with the Emperor if they cross them. This prevents players from treating my base area like a public thoroughfare and then claiming that the violation was accidental.

I recognised that, short of collecting reinforcements from outlying cities, there was little I could do in the further reaches of the Galaxy. I therefore divided the area outside the Imperial Zone into major slices and have appointed various powerful Starlords as 'Satraps' over these areas, named after the provincial governors of the ancient Persian Empire. This had the advantage to me of diverting some of the more powerful Starlords away from the Imperial Zone and of culling the numbers of smaller Starlords but it is also advantageous to the Satraps who, operating in areas legitimised by The Emperor, are growing strong at the expense of the minor lords.

THE LONG-HAUL STRATEGIES

So, in a game where the First Emperor has consolidated his strength and is in a secure position, which I believe is the condition of most games, what is the ordinary Starlord

continued on page 6



STARLORD

STARLORD is a colourful computer-run play-by-mail game of galactic warfare on a grand strategic scale. In each game there are one thousand stars to conquer and up to fifty players involved in the conflict. The ultimate aim is to become Emperor but the game doesn't end there. When you capture the Throne Star at the hub of the galaxy, you gain control of all the Empyr's ships and stars and try to hold on to power. Meanwhile, all the other players continue their struggle to grab the Throne. The Emperor does have one advantage though - he plays for free!

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continued from page 4

to do? The various options I think can be summarised as follows:-

1 The Sun Dive

My fairly derogatory name for this strategy reflects my opinion of it, although 'Dodor of the Hub' who outlined such a method in *Interim II*, might prefer the term 'Hubmanship'. Basically it proposes that an individual Starlord should make his way to the hub and there engage The Emperor.

Dodor claims that there is little The Emperor can do to hit back and that the Starlord stands to increase his strength in such activities. While it might be true that The Emperor may find it difficult to pin down a sundiver, this is by no means certain and the more powerful The Emperor is, the more stars he can hit. I have already destroyed one Starlord within the boundaries of my Imperial Zone; it was fairly easy and I captured his entire fleet intact with no losses to myself. The only way a sundiver could profit is if The Emperor were silly enough to leave incidental stars heavily garrisoned whilst he went off to reinforce. Dodor seems to be suggesting that his Emperor is doing this all the time but in such circumstances I would neither leave vulnerable garrisons nor wish to leave the hub for reinforcements.

The Sun Dive may succeed in annoying The Emperor, not very much else. The Starlord is likely to be destroyed eventually by The Emperor who will meanwhile no doubt be inviting and guiding other Starlords to help themselves to the sundiver's base area.

2 The Anti-Imperial Alliance

This probably provides the best, if not the only, way of removing the First Emperor early but it still remains a very difficult and dangerous task. It requires two or more players to work very closely together, co-ordinating their moves and making systematic attacks on the Throne Star itself.

At the very least the combined mobile strength of the alliance should be greater than The Emperor's, although, even if this is achieved, the more powerful The Emperor is the more ships he will be able to spare from the defence of the Throne to strike at the players' retreats.

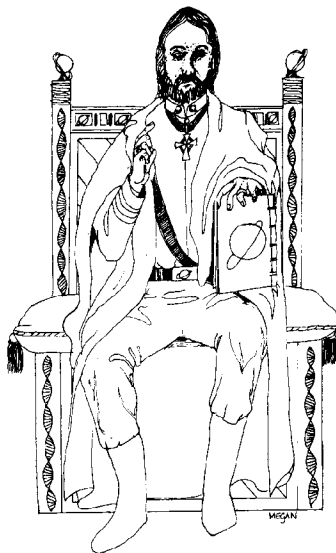
The Starlord 4 First Emperor was defeated by an alliance of two players working in this way. However, this was a Starlord and a Starlady sharing the same home address and in the final assault the Starlord seemed happy to allow his ally to capture his retreating starships, knocking him out of the game. I think that few members of normal alliances would be prepared to practise such kamekaze tactics. In any event, I suspect that The Emperor might have been relatively weak to start with.

Part of the problem with such an alliance is that only one of its members can become The Emperor. Also, despite the obvious advantages of close co-operation between players it seems that such alliances are quite rare and seldom go beyond the stage of border agreements and non-aggression pacts.

3 The Alternative Empire

This course of action, for one reason or another and in one form or another, is probably the standard practice. Here the Starlord makes no immediate attempt to get involved with The Emperor and embarks on the steady build up of his territory and fleet. Eventually he hopes to have achieved sufficient strength to be able to make his play for the Throne, perhaps after The Emperor has been debilitated by other encounters.

To some extent I think that this may be the only option for players in a game with a powerful Emperor but it can be a rather long and tedious process. Provided one does possess a fair number of cities and is able to keep interest up by engaging in local wars of conquest this policy has a lot to recommend it. If, however, one's territory is large but weak in cities and little outside stimulus is provided then it can begin to seem a little pointless.



4 The Imperium

This may be more a strategy for The Emperor rather than an individual Starlord, or just generally a desirable way for the game to develop. It was expounded by Martin Clark in *Interim II* and basically suggests that players should welcome the centralized control provided by The Emperor who would rule more through the support of the stronger Barons than by raw power alone.

This would lead to a more structured galactic society with feudal lords dominating the areas away from the hub and one where galactic politics, border wars, Imperial mediation, inter-faction pacts, succession, sieges, bribery and generally a more sophisticated level of diplomacy would flourish.

My own Galaxy is developing nicely along the lines of The Imperium with the Satraps fulfilling the role of the major Barons. The conditions are ripe but I'm not quite sure when and where the old anarchy ends and the new Golden Age begins.

THE PROBLEMS OF STARLORD

Having outlined some of the options open to players and the ways in which the

games might develop I think I should address myself to what I feel are some of the shortcomings. If we are Emperors and Warlords in our private Galaxies then Mike Singleton is surely God and I trust that he won't take too much offence at my comments.

It's tremendously exciting when you start a game of Starlord. However, if you've been playing in the same game for over a year, you've failed to become Emperor, and you're getting nowhere slowly, it can become a little stale. The two-week turn doesn't help and it was a good idea to start up some one-week Express games. Also after a while the options open to a player become a little limited. The economic factor in the game is largely superfluous and military operations are limited to your sole command ship.

I have been put off by some other PBM games by the sheer volume of information and paperwork entailed and it is part of Starlord's attraction that one's options and orders are fairly straightforward whilst allowing considerable strategic and tactical scope. One idea that would perhaps add a little to the game without changing its essential quality would be to create artifacts; special weapons, defensive systems, information devices, etc; that could be acquired, carried on a player's command ship and used a limited number of times.

I think that Mike Singleton is aware of these problems and his new game *Lords of Atlantis* promises more individual characters, infantry, cavalry and greater importance attached to diplomatic and economic factors. I eagerly await this game.

The other main worry I have about Starlord is the number of players in each game. Most Starlords writing in *Interim* suppose the games to contain about 50 players but I fear that many games contain considerably less than this. More players in a game would both help prevent stagnation and make for a more interesting Imperium. There does seem to be a fairly high rate of players dropping out or being knocked out and doubtless many players would rather start in a new game with the chance of becoming First Emperor than start in a fairly weak position in a long-established game. I feel that new games should be held off for the time being until some of the existing games have been filled out a bit. (I hope that Mike doesn't take this to mean that I want him to start scores of new players in the middle of my Imperial Zone.)

I certainly don't want to give the impression that I don't thoroughly enjoy playing Starlord and I wait avidly for the postman whenever a new move is due. I also count myself particularly fortunate to have become a Starlord Emperor and be entitled to wear the coveted white and purple sweatshirt of Imperial office. With the use of colourful graphic maps and the streamlined orders system Starlord might be considered as the 'Space Invaders' of the PBM game; the first of a new generation of such games which greatly improve on what came before and herald the arrival of more and better games in the future. ●

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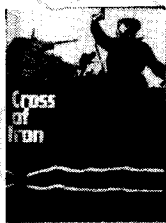
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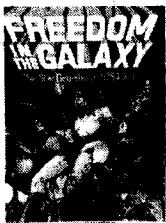
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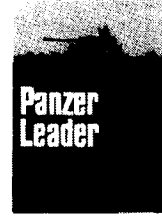
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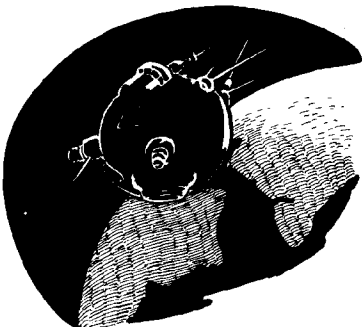
AT the outset I must own up to being a novice in CM PBM games. I have a professional interest in software for micro-computers and whilst scanning the newsagent's bookshelves, I came across an issue of *The Gamer & Computer Gamer*. This contained the news that Universe II was starting up in the UK and out of curiosity I enrolled as a player. This article describes the experiences and observations of an innocent-at-large in Quadrant IE (the UK quadrant) of UII (also marketed as Universe III in the US).

Each turn costs £1.75 or \$3 which may not seem unreasonable, but in the early stages little is achieved as you are stumbling around in the unknown. Should you set up a colony, then this operates as a separate entity to your starship and costs a further £1.75 or \$3 per turn.

This game does not play to a deadline, which may appear to some to be an advantage. However it does produce some peculiar effects, especially with slow UK turn-around. For example, I can arrive at a particular sector up to two weeks after another ship has been parked in that sector. Because his ship's log may already be on its way back to him, he will not know I am there. This lack of a deadline also increases the problem of trying to rendezvous with other ships in the same sector.

THE HUMAN LEAGUE

When each player enters the game he is given a rule book, which claims to contain about 20% of the total information available, and an initial ship's log, which shows his ship's position in the quadrant. As a novice, it took me until my third turn to appreciate that I was not going to get very far in UII from my own observations and by asking a limited number of questions of the GM. Fortunately in this turn I came across a civilised star system and was also contacted by another player who was interested in forming a human alliance for the exchange and pooling of information and for mutual aid. The information which I received from the star system gave me a basic appreciation of the value of the various ores and on the price of goods and equipment in general.



As a result of my contact with this other player, an alliance was formed with four founder members and was called the Human League. This alliance now has 11 members swapping information and gossip and giving help to each other when asked. I act as the central post-box and collator of the data. Another similar organisation which has been set up in Quadrant IE is CHOAM, which appears to operate along similar lines, although it charges outsiders for its information.

No doubt the editor would be interested in learning of other, similar organisations in UII or UIII [Yes - let us know and we'll publicise them in *The Mighty Pen*. NP].

In my opinion it is essential for groups of players to combine in this manner in the early stages of the game. Because the turn-around is slow, the game can only be speeded up in these early stages by this pooling of data. This really forms what I call Phase 1 of the game, which is the accumulation of information such as a sector-map, a list of known starships, prices obtained for ores picked up in space, the range of equipment which can be bought and their prices, and the requirements for colonisation. In addition, you still have to keep yourself, crew and ship intact from the more pugnacious players and from the more hazardous sectors in space. As an example, figure 1 shows a

partial map of quadrant IE: other quadrants in the US games have similar mixtures of star systems and hazards.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

With this information, you can then move into Phase 2, which is to formulate some sort of plan of campaign. At this stage, you have two main options, which may be combined if you are working in a group:

a) Exploration/Trade: This option does not require a fixed base from which to operate. It involves entering the unmapped regions of the quadrant and at the same time building up a collection of ores for future trading. In the process the explorer will probably reach a region under the influence of one of the less friendly alien races such as the Ixtli and Regajians. As the borders of these regions are usually protected by minefields, the would-be explorer is well advised to have a space-mine probe on board. Two of our brethren have already destroyed their starships by, with consummate skill, hitting three minefields in succession. (Note that on losing a ship, the captain is resurrected with indecent haste and is given another starship, presumably to reduce the risk of the player dropping out of the game). Although these two races are willing to trade, they usually require you to sever your relationships with other alien or human alliances.

UNIVERSE II/III - RULES SUMMARY

You are the commander of a starship that has entered a quadrant of a universe which exists in parallel with our own and which is named UNIVERSE II. Your ship has an initial crew of 300, which increases with time. The ship also has a power source that will deliver a maximum of 5 units. This power has to be shared between propulsion, defensive screens and a Phase Projector for offense.

The universe can be visualised as a piece of graph paper, one parsec thick, divided into squares or sectors with sides of one parsec, so basically the ship travels in two dimensions only. Each turn, you can travel from 0-5 sectors, depending on how much power you allocate to propulsion. You can scan 3 sectors per turn at a distance of up to 3 sectors from your current position. Each ship sends out an identifying signal within a limited range. Having once identified another ship or civilised planet, you can then contact that ship or planet by sending a message on a 5 x 3 card with your next Operational Plan.

Your ship is initially placed within an area of UII which is controlled by friendly aliens. As you travel through this area, you will meet other ships and find inhabited, civilised planets where

you can trade and uninhabited planets which can be colonised. You will also come across various cosmic phenomena such as ionic storms, radiation barriers, impact zones and the odd black hole.

Each turn you receive a ship's log which indicates your current position and what was present in the sectors you have just traversed. Information is also given on the sectors you have scanned, the identity of ships in the area, any ore or other space debris you may have picked up and the results of any actions you may have taken, including any skirmishes with other ships.

The general objective is to build up a power base by expanding your spaceship fleet from the original one starship and/or colonising various planets. To achieve this you will probably have to cooperate with other players. However, bear in mind that there are other, not-so-friendly alien races lurking in the surrounding regions.

The turn fee includes three special actions (you cannot pay more to get more), allowing you to ask questions of the gamemaster and undertake non-standard activities. Replies tend to be terse.

Players wishing to contact the Human League can write to Peter Kerridge via the FLAGSHIP editorial address.

The explorer will also be interested in expanding his fleet and weaponry for increased protection and, if he is interested in trading, for increased cargo-carrying capacity. This option can be carried out alone or in a group.

b) Colonisation: No single starship can set up an *efficient* colony, at any rate not without very prolonged preparation. It can be done by one starship, but on a shoe-string. Ideally a group of starships should combine to set up a colony, stripping down a battle-cruiser for the initial life-support systems. This way there would be an adequate initial population and one starship could be placed on defence whilst the others were gathering the necessary ore and equipment. The scope for colonisation means that you can have a game within a game, especially if an opposing colony is set up on the same planet.

The more blood-thirsty readers may wonder why I have not mentioned piracy as an option. This is because in the early stages of the game I do not think that piracy is viable, for two reasons:

1) Few players or colonies will have accumulated sufficient wealth to make the risk of attack worthwhile.

2) Attacking another starship on a one-to-one basis, with the initial equipment provided, has little or no effect. A would-be pirate will need first to build up a more efficient weapons system and preferably a larger fleet of ships, by which time the pickings should be richer.

Phase 3, which is only just beginning in the UK game, appears to be the grouping of the human players into various alliances with each other and with other alien races, who are at present lurking on the borders of the region under Etuel influence. This is presumably preparatory to these aliens invading Etuel territory, when there will be the opportunity for full-scale battles.

A note about the star-map. This has been made up from information pooled from at least 15 players, and is as accurate as the data given (not everybody tells the truth). Those sectors marked A for asteroids should be treated with care. Most will contain asteroids only but some have been scanned by ships unable to detect such details as ionic storms, minefields, etc. It would be possible to differentiate between the two, but that might make life too easy. At present the Ixtli sphere of influence lies along the eastern border of the quadrant, and the Regajian along the southern border. Both are protected by minefields. It is possible but difficult to cross into other quadrants.

Overall I would be reasonably satisfied with the game, if it were not for two major criticisms:

1) The slow turn-around, (only applies in UK).

2) The inflexibility and lack of imagination in the interpretation of the rules by the GM.

On the plus side, I personally prefer a game which concentrates on the use of diplomacy (even if it is armed), subtlety and machiavellian planning, rather than on out-and-out mayhem.

However the greatest enjoyment has been gained from my contacts with other players, and I would like to acknowledge

UNIVERSE II sector map: Quadrant IE

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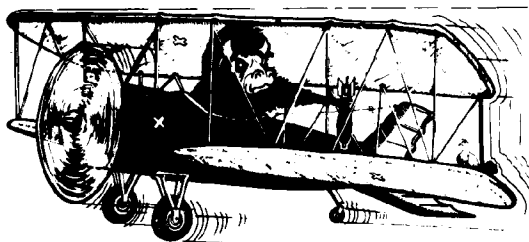
LEGEND

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| = Unknown | R = Radio signal | B = Radiation barrier |
| A = Asteroids | * = Star system | Z = Impact zone |
| I = Ionic storm | H = Black hole | X = Midway marker |
| M = Minefield | W = Warning beacon | |

all those who have written to me in the past 10 months. In an age when letter-writing is supposed to be dead, I have accumulated a considerable amount of correspondence, ranging from the nearly illegible handwritten letter to the almost incomprehensible computer printout. In particular I would like to thank 89890 OWEN GLENDOWER for being my original contact in the Human League, and the

commanders of 55550 BONAVENTURE and 47480 THE BLACK SHADOW for providing so much information (true and false), ideas and interest. It is a pity that these last two ships have gone to that great scrap-yard in the sky, but at least their commanders are still with us. Finally, what a diverse set of characters you games players appear to be. It seems I am the only sane person in the game.

Go ahead and try several play-by-mail companies, but be sure to try the best: Flying Buffalo Inc., the only company that has been running pbm games since 1970 (not just "the 70's").



► **Our games are completely refereed by our computers.*** No human moderator interferes with your game. The computer is fast, unbiased, and does not make mistakes. It treats all the players exactly the same. We don't move units in your game. And we don't interpret your orders according to how we think you should be playing the game.

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► **You are on an equal footing with the other players.** Each game has a limited number of players, and every player starts on Turn One (with the exception of *Starlord* and *Heroic Fantasy*, which have special rules). No player is allowed to have more than one position. You don't have to fight players who have been in the game building up for the last three years, and you don't have to fight rich players who "buy" the game by spending hundreds of dollars a month on extra positions and special actions.

► **You buy the rules first.** We don't allow you to join a game until after you see the rules. We want you to be sure you are interested before you find yourself in the middle of a game.

* If you really want a game run by a person, you can try our game *Treacherous Trajan's Trap*, which is hand-run. But we really think the computer does a better job.



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Ask for our free catalog, or send \$5 for the rules to all of the above games. Please do not ask to enter any game before reading the rules.

25,000 STARWEB is simply a game of ordinary Starweb with two differences:

- (i) The victory point total required to win is fixed at 25,000.
- (ii) There is a free choice of the six character types. For example, all the players could choose to be a berserker.

How does the game differ from an ordinary game of Starweb in practice? Let us first look at the first step in the game – character type choice.

There are two plausible approaches – to treat it as an ordinary game, albeit with a much higher victory point target which is known by all the players, or to treat it like Starweb to the Bitter End (another Starweb variant with no victory points, all players Empire Builders and victory purely military).

Given the first approach, all the character types are valid options. It is important to bear in mind that not only is the required total very high but everyone knows exactly how much it is and how close individual players are to achieving it. It is therefore worth giving greater consideration to the character types which can score a large number of points quickly or are difficult to stop once points are being scored. In the former category are berserkers and merchants and in the latter artifact collectors (however, see below for further thoughts on collectors) and perhaps apostles.

Using the second approach, however, artifact collectors and empire builders are clearly not options, having no abilities which are conceivably useful in battle. In military terms, the two apparently best characters are pirates (powerful in space) and berserkers (powerful on planets). One should, however, not overlook the merchant, who has the power to build up ship strength much more quickly than the others. The apostle is good at defending his planets against anyone except berserkers but his pacifist tendencies can be a handicap.

So which is the best type to choose? As is usual with multi-player games, the question cannot be answered with certainty. A good choice is the berserker. He is strong militarily, in that against non-berserkers he can deny control of planets unless players go through the long process of destroying robots and re-populating. This is of most benefit in a negative sense: if another player destroys a berserker he will be largely denied any fruits of victory and may be an easy target for a third player. The berserker is also a good choice with regard to victory points. Admittedly he does not score at a great rate in the normal course of events but he has the ability to score a very large number of points in one turn – several thousand is not difficult given sufficient preparation.

The disadvantages with the berserker are firstly that other players will be afraid of a powerful berserker and may seek to kill all berserkers quickly. However players can be notoriously uncooperative. The second disadvantage is that in a straight fight, with all else equal, a pirate should beat a berserker. However, things are rarely equal.

My feeling, and I may be wrong, is that the military option is the better one. In the normal game it can take approximately



twenty turns to achieve 5,000 points. To achieve 25,000 points may take up to forty turns. Consider how much happens in twenty turns and how many players are destroyed in that time. In forty turns, very few players will normally be left alive. Anyone ignoring the military side in order to score points is likely to be crushed.

Having chosen our character type let us now turn to the game itself. In what ways does the play of the game differ from an ordinary game?

**Frustrated by short games?
For luxurious long-term
planning, GRAHAM BUCKELL
suggests 25000 STARWEB,
alias . . .**

SUPERWEB

The first is dropouts. Unfortunately you can expect several dropouts in an ordinary game. Most players are likely to be adjacent to at least one. The problems are to identify them and to move into their territory as quickly as possible before someone else takes the spoils. In the 25,000 game the players will be of a more dedicated breed. This means that the number of dropouts will be small and conceivably none at all. The need to identify dropouts is again strong but as not all the players will be adjacent to one the required reaction may be to attack a player who has taken (or, preferably, is still in the process of taking) a dropout's territory.

The second difference leads on from the first. The players will normally be experienced and tougher to fight. In an ordinary game, a vigorous attack on an inexperienced player may well cause him to lose heart and drop out quickly. This is more profitable for the attacker than a normal dropout as he is already deep into the dropout's territory. In the 25,000 game, attacks will normally be harder. This means



that at least in the early stages of the games allies will be necessary to reduce the risk of damaging yourself irreparably in a war even if you win. It also means that the loser will fight longer and, if he feels that all hope is gone, will probably try to destroy his home planet to deny it to the victor.

The third difference is that it is more important than normal to build strength quickly. In the ordinary game, it depends to some extent on your type whether it is better to concentrate on expansion or on construction. Certainly if you are an artifact collector it remains a good idea to push out quickly to beat others to artifacts. However, even here strength is important, as a collector is unlikely to find sufficient artifacts himself to have a hope of winning. He will need to conquer others and grab their artifacts. It should be noted that taking another player's artifacts is very difficult – another reason why I think that an artifact collector is a poor character choice.

In conclusion, I would thoroughly recommend playing at least one game of 25,000 Starweb. Starweb is a great game but even good games can pall after a while. 25,000 Starweb is sufficiently different to make it a different experience, but not so different that your Starweb experience will not be useful. ●

STARWEB – RULES SUMMARY

You are the ruler of a single planet of beings just beginning to explore a web of 225 planets linked by complex and un-mapped paths. You can build ships to explore and conquer; each of your ships and planets will get a report on enemy forces at or moving past the planet, as well as a list of the neighboring worlds, thereby enabling you gradually to build up a map of the Web.

You can choose between six roles. The Empire Builder wins by controlling large, highly populated worlds. The Merchant wins by transporting raw materials for other players. The Pirate wins by plundering conquered worlds. The Artifact Collector wins by accumulating artifacts found on conquered worlds or obtained from other players. The Berserker is a computer who wins by destroying life. The Apostle, finally, wins by converting populations to his viewpoint.

Most roles have special advantages; the Merchant, for instance, can transport twice as much cargo per ship, while the Pirate can capture enemy fleets intact if he has more than 3-1 superiority. The central dilemma of the game is that ships are usable both for fighting and for transporting raw materials to industrial worlds in order to build more ships: fight too much and you run out of ships; build too much and the other players reach the valuable neutral worlds before you. A practical solution is to employ the Merchant to do your transporting for you – but you may become dangerously dependent on a rival player!

The game lasts until a target of (normally) between 1000 and 10000 points, the exact figure being the average of 'bids' secretly put in by the players, so the precise endpoint is unknown. Strategy changes radically in longer games, as Graham Buckell discusses in SUPERWEB.

Playing the game may be the important thing, but you want to win *sometimes*. ROB CHAPMAN is one of the most successful PBM players ever seen (7 wins in his first 10 games), and he tells how he does it in . . .



This article originally appeared in slightly modified form in the author's Diplomacy zine *Putty Riffa*. Although it was written with Diplomacy in mind, it applies equally to any multi-player PBM game.

HOW TO WIN AT PBM

ARTICLES about tactics, the best openings for Italy or theories about German mid-game strategy, are all very interesting and entertaining to read or to write, but will rarely give you any worthwhile advice about the practicalities of playing. A game of Diplomacy is more than just an exercise in strategic planning and tactical manoeuvring – it is a clash between seven diverse and often discordant personalities. Not everyone will agree with my approach, but nevertheless I will offer some suggestions about how to best organise your games and conduct effective negotiations in order to achieve profitable results.

First of all, then you need to ORGANISE ALL AVAILABLE INFORMATION about each game. Some kind of filing system is required. I use a ring folder, into which I file all incoming correspondence; I keep a record sheet in the front of the folder with the GM's and players' addresses and telephone numbers, and I record the date each letter is received or sent.

NEVER MISS A MOVE. Obviously, you must ensure that you always get your orders to the GM before the deadline. Make a note of the date on a calendar or in your diary, or on the game map itself. It's a good idea to submit a set of orders as soon as you receive each adjudication. You will probably want to change them again later as a result of your diplomatic efforts, but at least you will have a set of orders on file in case you forget the deadline. Always keep a copy of your orders.

WRITE LOTS OF LETTERS. Write to everyone in the game every season if you

can manage it. Write long friendly letters (it's a very friendly hobby – enjoy your correspondence). Analyse the game, exchange information, suggest possible moves for your allies, ask for suggestions for your own moves. When you can't discuss the game, talk about something else, the weather, what you did on your holidays etc. Get to know your opponents; introduce yourself at the beginning of the game by giving some personal details about yourself, the others will usually reciprocate. Stay friendly with everyone for as long as possible.

ASK QUESTIONS. A question will provoke a response, your correspondent is obliged to reply. Ask direct questions. Make your opponent commit himself. 'What do you intend to do with your A(Bur) next season?' If he tells you, all well and good. If he doesn't, or is evasive, then you have good reason to be suspicious about his intentions (so ask him again). If he tells a lie, then you can claim he has double-crossed you and you have an excuse to stab him (if you want to).

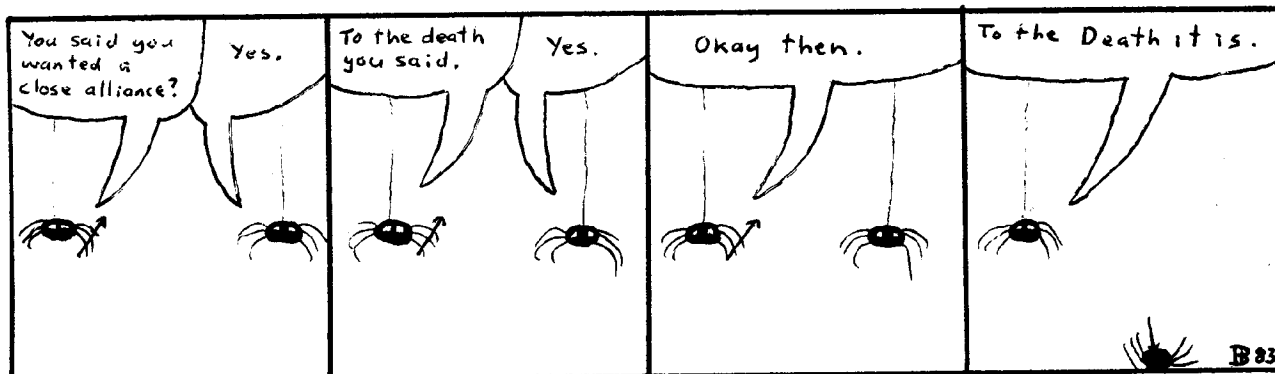
TELL THE TRUTH. Too many players think Diplomacy is about treachery and deceit. It's not – it's about honesty and trust. You will have to trust people throughout the game, and you will want the other players to trust you. They won't trust you if you demonstrate a willingness to tell lies. Tell the other players what your moves will be when you can, especially during the early stages of the game – build up a reputation for being truthful, this will prove to be very useful later on . . .

DON'T STAB INDISCRIMINATELY. If you are going to stab then make it count, it's not much good if you don't make substantial gains. Attack the weak – persuade others to attack the strong. Be sure you have good reason for the stab; if you are the aggrieved party ('... he double-crossed me') then neutral powers will not be so concerned by your belligerence. Try to avoid being seen as the aggressor. Apologise to your victim immediately, and point out the very good reasons why you were *forced* to take such drastic action (blame another player if possible); remain on friendly terms (you might need his help later and you don't want him to bear any grudges).

Always expect to be stabbed yourself. Each season work out what damage your neighbours can do to you and be prepared for the worst. If you are stabbed, write to your assailant in good humour (disguise the exasperation) and discreetly point out the dire consequences of his rash decision. Whatever happens, keep negotiating.

EVERYTHING IS NEGOTIABLE. Promises are not binding (although you can claim they should be if it is someone else making them). Keep your plans flexible, your options open – don't commit yourself, or your forces, to any long term strategy. Be prepared to respond to the changing fortunes of the game.

And finally, KEEP A LOW PROFILE. You don't want to become a target so avoid getting a reputation. If you do win a few games, don't tell anyone. Don't start your own zine or become involved in hobby politics. And don't write any articles . . . ●



Has he cracked the Warboid Secret?
JOHN PRIDMORE'S cheeky challenge:

THE GREAT SUBTERRANEAN WAR-RIDE



I RECEIVED a sheet of paper advertising a PBM game called Warboid World. I get a lot of sheets like that: everyone and his dog seems to want players for their amazing sensational state-of-the-art PBM game. I read it, thinking about something else, and – wait a minute – what was that it said again? – ‘Different? Yes, because it’s non-diplomatic. You don’t know who you’re playing against.’

That’s an *advantage*? Yes, the leaflet went on, warming to its theme: ‘If you are an old hand at PBM games then you have probably been frustrated by ‘pre-formed alliances’ who have worked against you in a game. These kind of alliances often take the form of groups of players who live in the same area or groups of your former enemies from other PBM games... Warboid World solves this problem as no-one knows which game he is in or who his opponents are until the game is over.’

I was really interested now, but not quite believing it I wrote to the GM asking if I can take it that he has no objection if a way could be found to foil the designer’s plan? He replied, ‘Yes, consider it a challenge to identify the opposition. It won’t be easy. You’ll have to go some to beat the system!’

A challenge, eh? Right! What we need is a way to identify each other. Now Warboid World has covered joint entrance pretty thoroughly; you don’t know your game, you have purely local map-references unrelated to anyone else’s map-references, and games are started in batches to avoid

guessing anything from the start date. If we are to form a designer-defying alliance, then, we need a way to attract each other’s attention in the course of the game. So? So how about some great event that is instantly recognizable across a large area? Such as? Such as a tunnel – the largest tunnel in the world – the Great Tunnel! And how will we detect this incredible tunnel? With a Seismoid, of course. A Seismoid covers an area of 37 hexes for tunnel-detection purposes, and a properly-placed Seismoid should be able to detect our tunnel on as many as three consecutive turns.

You will need two Seismoids to participate in the Great Tunnel project. You ought to be able to find at least one of them somewhere in your home area; otherwise you will need to build them. If your barriers are East/South, you should place the Seismoids in 4746 and 4755; if they are West/North, then 5346 and 5355 are where you want them. In both cases it will be sufficient to have them on station for Turns 8–11 inclusive, the tunnel-builders delaying their great labour to give you time to get into position. If you detect a tunnel during this period, get in touch with the Tunnel Commander (see below), and tell him the hex location of the detected tunnel and the turn when detection was achieved. A cross-check with the tunnel position on the next turn should suffice to identify the tunnel uniquely, allowing you to merge your maps and start a beautiful alliance.

Tunnel Commander? Well, what we need

is one Great Tunnel to be started in each of the six possible directions in each batch of games. Batches can be defined as follows:

- 1a) All Adventures By Mail games (US-based) starting before publication of FLAGSHIP 1
- 1b) All Balrog Adventures (UK-based) games starting before publication of FLAGSHIP 1
- 2a) All ABM games starting after publication of issue 1 but before issue 2
- 2b) All Balrog games in this time period ... and so on! If you are playing in a game of Warboid World, write to me c/o FLAGSHIP (see editorial address at the front) giving your barrier orientation, and I’ll let you know whether you are one of the first six of your ‘batch’ (so eligible to command a tunnel project) and how many Great Tunnels are already being dug in your batch.

I know, I know, you’re going to ask if I think anyone will be stupid enough to tell the Tunnel Commander where their STICs are located. But he already knows where the STICs are located, all 16 of them, and so do you. What he doesn’t know is which ones are potential allies and which are just anonymous foes. So to put it in a nutshell, I’ll ask *you* a question. Up to three players can detect my tunnel on the same turn. If two of them contact me, would you like to be the odd man out, knowing that we could conspire to invade your STIC? Not even a games genius like yourself could stand up to odds of 3–1!

WARBOID WORLD – RULES SUMMARY

16-player game with total player anonymity. You are a ramshackle Subterranean Industrial Complex (STIC) which has been programmed to take control of wandering robots and wage war on enemy STICs. Human life is regrettably extinct.

You start with your underground fastness and a limited number of factories, power plants, robots (called ‘boids’) and a Sensor Network to detect ‘boid’ movement. There are 25 ‘boid’ types which can be built or captured, each with different capabilities for attack, defence, movement and special powers: for example, a Zomboid will make ‘boids’ ignore their controllers and wander off, while a Generaloid will increase the attack power of friendly forces. Movement is both on the surface and by digging tunnels. Combat is possible only in the same hex, though control of a Satelloid enables you to call down nuclear/particle-beam strikes to your aid.

Victory points are gained by destroying enemy ‘boids’ and enemy STICs; the winner is the player with most points after a time secretly determined by the GM, between 15 and 30 turns.

All reports 100% computerized.



Tired of simple games? MARTIN CLARK invites you to take the

EMPYREAN CHALLENGE

EMPYREAN CHALLENGE is a big, computer-moderated, PBM, SF-oriented game, little known outside the USA. The objective of each player is to gain control over a majority of the habitable worlds among the 500 or so in the 100-system 'Empyrean Cluster'. Sounds familiar? Yes, but this is no ordinary build-and-conquer game: the mass of detail simulated is quite staggering, and players face a unique challenge merely getting to grips with the system.

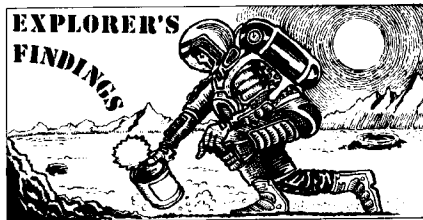
In overview, EC can best be described as a first-generated nuts-and-bolts game: 'first-generation' in that the state of the art has advanced beyond it in such areas as readable printouts; 'nuts-and-bolts' in that ships and colonies must be built up from manufactured raw materials. In this respect it resembles Universe II/III, though with a wider equipment range and only two types of raw material.

PRODUCTION AND PEOPLE

Each player starts as the sole ruler of a 'nation' controlling a single colony (settlement) on a homeworld with 14 other nations. The 15 nations together make up one of the ten races in the Cluster, and it is extremely important whether the nations in a race are prepared to work together, both for immediate practical reasons – each colony has access to only one type of raw material ore or fuel deposit, and must trade or fight for the others – and because it is possible for the race to win a team victory as an alternative to an individual player victory.

Surface geography is not shown: colonies are simply identified by number. All 'planets' are classified as Terrestrial (allowing Earth-type cities), Gas Giant moons, or Asteroid belts; even non-terrestrial planets permit specially-constructed enclosed cities or orbital colonies fuelled by solar power.

Each nation starts with a modest and rapidly-consumed stockpile of essential materials. Production, however, also requires suitably-trained personnel for farming, mining, factory work and assembly, and you will also want a trained army. Your population is classified into a range from 'Unemployables' (e.g. the very young and very old) through to the highly-trained 'Professionals', all with different rates of pay (in consumer goods) and all with a natural tendency to unrest and rebellion which forces you to employ 'Spy' units to keep an eye on them. You didn't expect running a nation to be easy, did you?



Now, if you can stave off invasion, civil insurrection, famine and industrial collapse for long enough, equipment starts coming off the production lines four turns (one year) after your initial orders. Military units are slightly abstract, ranging through most general types from robots to anti-missile missiles. As an alternative, you can turn your efforts to research. Once sufficient research points have been 'produced' or bought from the market, the colony can build next-generation equipment. The problem is that each tech level costs double that of its predecessor, so anyone attempting to go it alone will rapidly find himself outspent by research combines of other natures, with all his equipment obsolescent before it starts. Cooperation in research is *the* vital factor for any successful race, even if the nations are

otherwise in conflict, and it will rapidly lead to domination of the individualists.

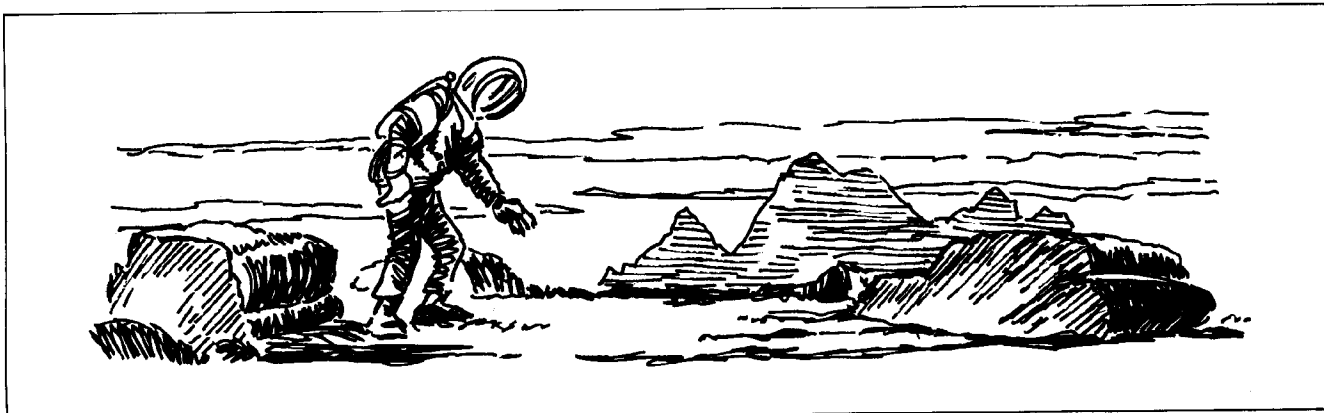
UPWARDS AND OUTWARDS

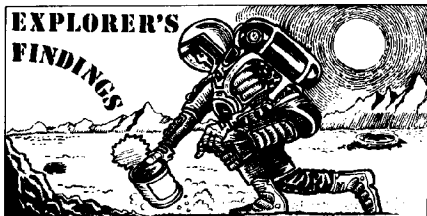
With, say, a third of the original 15 colonies under your control, you will generate enough production and scrap materials to get by until mining colonies within your home system can be set up to meet demand. When this has been achieved, rulers can start to think about major out-system expansion. The Cluster is a sphere within a cube of sides 30 light-years long, and inter-system movement rates are governed by tech levels – one light-year per tech level per turn. You can also try hyperjumping, the chance of success in which also depends on tech level, and failure in which will melt your engine or destroy the ship.

Have we left something out? Yes! – the other races. These will be competing for all but the nearest planets of any real use, and diplomatic settlements in this ferocious game rarely extend beyond the range of the biggest missiles. However, an extensive standing fleet is an impossible drain on men, firepower and back-up services, so combat tends to be individual ship-to-ship duels, with the occasional climactic fleet action deciding the fate of a world, system or even race.

PLAYER ROLES

You can play at three levels. Most people start as Rulers of nations, and these are the central figures in the game. However, as the game progresses you may find it desirable to pass on control of some of your colonies or ships to new players called Regents: this saves you work and real dollars while leaving you with strategic control, not least by keeping command of the Spy units. Regents pay a lower starting fee. Sometimes players drop out, or a ship





or colony spontaneously revolts, and the position is then offered to Independents, who also pay a lower turn fee to reflect the generally enfeebled starting position which they inherit (no independent has yet won a game).

At heart, EC is a world-economic game without undue complexity, but anyone who doesn't own a calculator is in real trouble. Information on the printout is in statistical format, with no human GM comment, and absorbing the reports, planning, and writing the next turn's orders require a high degree of concentration: for serious players only! Furthermore, the game is not cheap or quick, deadlines being at least a month apart (which does facilitate international play). However, it is a challenge, if frequently an exercise in frustration, and those looking for something more than a 'get out there and kill' game could well find it meets their taste.

Note to European readers: a Euro-players 'race' is being organized for the next EC game, and some positions are still available. For a look at the 70-page rulebook and a sample printout, contact Bob Brown, 53 Broadwood Drive, Preston, Lancs PR2 4SS, UK.



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VERY few people who play professional computer-moderated games have been involved in the amateur postal gaming hobby. Some might have caught glimpses of strange dye-haired students selling mimeo-printed amateur magazines at games conventions, or puzzled over cryptic small ads in professional ones, but most people won't have even suspected that such a hobby existed.

I find this sad because the amateur approach to postal gaming has a lot to commend it. Having been active in this hobby for several years I would heartily recommend it to anyone searching for some new interest to take up.

POSTAL DIPLOMACY

As with many new notions (fast food, television commercials, computerised skateboards) the idea for running games by post, not for profit, but simply for fun, came from the United States. To be exact, in 1963 Dr John Boardman of New York decided that it would be an interesting idea to run a game of postal diplomacy, a board game published four years earlier. Surprisingly, this idea proved to be very popular and soon games of Diplomacy were being run by other people all over the US.

To understand why the game is so successful postally, you really should know a little about the game itself. Diplomacy is a historical game for seven players, who take the roles of leaders of certain European countries around the year 1901. Each country has a number of armies and fleets at its disposal to deploy with the objective of conquering any of the various 'supply centres' which litter the game board. Control of each centre entitles the player to build another army or fleet. The winner is the player who manages to capture a majority of centres on the board.

However the game is not a simple tactical exercise involving little skill. The fact that six other players are also trying to win imbues any winning strategy with a necessary degree of subtlety. Diplomacy is the name of the game (literally!) and successful players are those who can outwit and outguess their opponents diplomatically, skilfully plotting the downfall of each one, with the carefully solicited help of the others until only one remains, and preferably in no condition to prevent the final drive to victory... The guile and treachery is enhanced by the simple fact

Explore the world of the postal zine in...

THE AMATEUR SCENE

by SIMON BILLINNESS

that all players secretly write their orders then the armies and fleets are moved simultaneously.

Postal Diplomacy eliminates one of the major problems of face-to-face Dip: namely the lack of required secrecy. I have had many a game ruined when, for instance, I have arranged a joint attack on a player who, unbeknown to us, is still within earshot. When I play postal Diplomacy I have none of these worries since it is well-nigh impossible for other players to intercept mail and bug telephone calls!

Another problem of face-to-face play is finding six other players who are prepared to sit down for the ten solid hours usually required to play the game to conclusion. I have tried to solve this with my games group by arranging several two-hourly sessions on a certain weekday, but unfinished games, held over for a week, have suffered when a player has failed to turn up again. When you play postally, opponents from all over the country are found for you. Players are usually only required to send in orders every month, so the work of striking deals with other players and formulating in-depth strategies can be easily slotted in whenever you have free time.

The ease in which postal Diplomacy has overcome the problems of face-to-face play is reflected in the numbers of games run by post every year; hundreds of games were started in 1982.

THE ZINES

The vast majority of these games are run through amateur postal games magazines ('zines') which are usually published to

monthly or five-weekly deadlines. Your first glance at a postal gaming zine may not be very favourable. Zines are often scruffily printed (by professional standards) since many of them are even duplicated by editors themselves. In addition the contents seem at first hand to be incomprehensible game reports and editorial in-jokes.

The reason for this is that zines are ultimately produced for the enjoyment of their editors. Editors write about whatever interest them, so you will often come across articles not only on games but also on politics, sport, music (definitions of this are contentious) and a wealth of other topics. Most zines contain letter columns where readers write about anything they like. Sometimes they even write about games. One of the strengths of the amateur postal gaming hobby is its variety and freedom. If you merely want to play games then you can subscribe to a games-only 'warehouse' zine. However if you want a zine in which you can play *and* read about the editor's experiences as a sound engineer, you can. It's your choice.

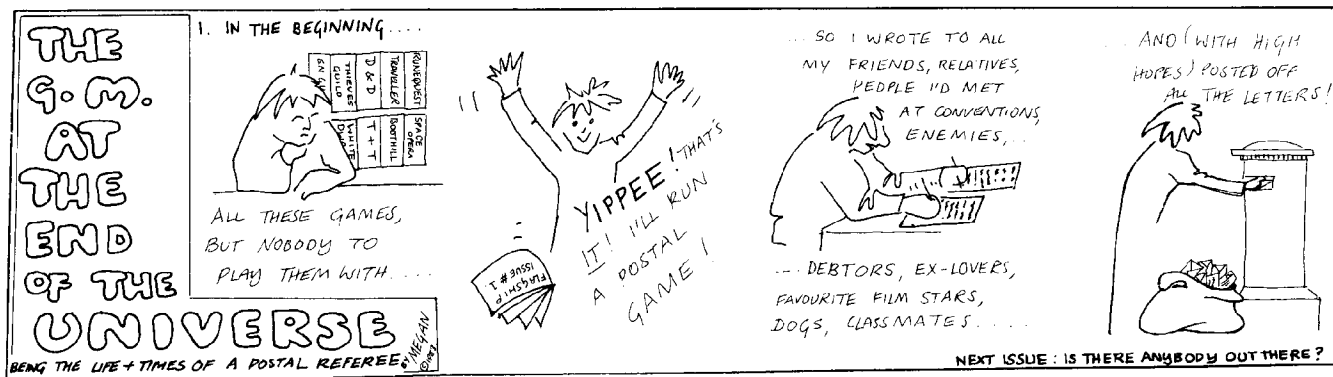
Another strength is the number of games available in amateur zines. Being non-profit making (in fact in all cases definitely loss-making) zines can run proprietary games without fear of legal action. Diplomacy, Kingmaker, Civilization, Dungeons & Dragons, Sorcerer's Cave and Railway Rivals are all games which you won't find offered professionally, but are played profusely in amateur circles. More interestingly, nowadays home computers are increasingly being used to help run games, and I would not be surprised if, in a few years time, games similar to those offered by professional companies are being run in amateur zines for a fraction of the current cost. ●

GETTING INTO THE AMATEUR SCENE

The amateur PBM publications offer more variety and informality than the professionals at lower cost, but lower physical quality and less commitment to long-term regular service. If after reading Simon's article you want to explore further, write for a list of amateur publications to:

(US readers) Roy Hendricks, 128 Deerfield Drive, Pittsburg, PA 15235, enclosing \$1

(UK readers) Simon Billinness, 20 Winifred Road, Coulsdon, Surrey CR3 3JA, enclosing 35p



Looking for a new fantasy PBM game?
ROY KAY compares the

WORLDS of BLED and CRASIMOFF

PBM in the fantasy role-playing mould – this is the common ground between *Crasimoff's World* and *The Keys of Bled*, two British-based games which may be new to US readers. Beyond that, the differences in style and mechanics are striking.

THE SCENARIOS

A captain of an interstellar colony ship, you are heading for a newly discovered world – thus begins the introductory scenario to *The Keys of Bled*. Your journey is not fated to run its expected course and a tractor beam of sinister power causes you to crash-land on the mysterious planet called Bled. Many of your colonists have survived, along with a useful number of livestock and horses. You thus decide to move out, and become one of the PEOPLES OF BLED...

Well, it's as logical an excuse for a PBM game as any other. You, the player, are invited to choose a name for your people and to nominate a suitable leader. On game entry you are given details of your start location plus terrain descriptions of the eight surrounding 'sectors'. Your people's leader will have a demanding and burdensome responsibility ahead as he or she steers, organises and cares for the surviving colonists on their explorations and adventures.

Crasimoff and the astoffs are not another eccentric-sounding pop group, but rather the mysterious and super-powerful former inhabitants of *Crasimoff's World*. A brief but complicated scenario including sorcerer scientists, virus-created plagues, elixirs of eternal life and an ultimately scattered humanity form the background to the game. You begin with a party of ten adventurers whom you must name and describe. One must be the Chieftain, the others can be any combination of Fighters, Priests and/or Mages – the choice is yours. New parties begin the game with equipment which will include 'introductory' spells and powers for mages and priests, a discount-pass for the town in which your adventure starts, and a modest supply of Oraks – the currency of *Crasimoff's World*.

ON THE MOVE

As might be expected, both games require the player to fill out forms detailing his or her moves and other requirements.

Bled has the DECISION SHEET and the DECISION RESULT SHEET... the player lists a choice of actions on the former, then awaits to be told the results of those

actions on the latter, which the GM supplies. The highly-structured nature of the *Bled* rules present the player with a considerable number of preset options to select from, all of which can be further multiplied if the player decides to split his people into 'sub-groups' – each of which has its own named leader and can, in certain circumstances,



be capable of completely independent movement. In addition, a further set of combat rules exist which are amongst the most complex in the PBM field.

Meanwhile, back in *Crasimoff's World*, the 'Round Sheet' is a multi-function form which has room for your actions and for the GM's reactions. This well-designed form features a hex-map centred on your current position on which you are asked to mark your intended route. Your party has a maximum of six movement points each round and how you are able to utilise these will depend on the type of terrain you decide to travel through – for example, 'clear' hexes cost just one movement point, whilst mountains cost three. In some respects CW is a less harsh environment than Bled. In CW your party is assumed to be almost always capable of finding enough food by 'catching wildlife, picking berries, and digging for root vegetables'. However, on Bled, supplying your people with enough food to survive on can, in some areas, be a real problem for the player.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Both games allow players the opportunity to specify their own actions via 'player choice' sections, on the turn sheets.

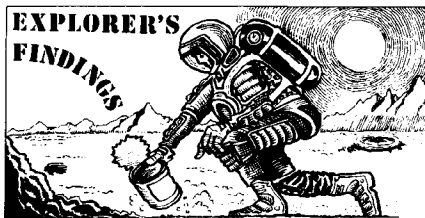
Exclusively computer-moderated games are becoming the norm in commercial PBM. However, in *Bled* and in CW, whilst micro-computers are apparently used for mechanics and record-keeping, the human GM plays a more important role. The level of commitment by these GM's is remarkable, each obviously taking considerable time and trouble to bring the games alive for the individual player. The results of your actions are presented in story form, and the feeling of player-involvement can be acute.

It's fair to say that Bled and CW both contain much that is as yet underdeveloped and underexplored. This, to the imaginative and enthusiastic role-player, can only be good news. Within the flavour and format of each game, creative and resourceful strategy will add to the fortunes

of the individual player, and ultimately enhance and enrich the games themselves.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

It might be interesting to speculate on the form that these future developments could take. With its focus on the tribe/race theme, Bled might eventually provide opportunity for power-hungry players to control and administrate large areas of the planet. Complicated wars might be fought over important and/or particularly fertile locations. In all these manoeuvres, who knows what role the mysterious and so far rather elusive 'KEYS' will perform? Rumoured to be originally gifts from the Gods, the KEYS unlock doorways to know-



ledge and power, although seemingly few players have made any significant discoveries as yet. Also, *Bled* should provide a fertile background for those who enjoy and employ the intricacies of politics and diplomacy in their gaming.

Crasimoff's World, with its centre of attention fixed on small party adventuring, offers different possibilities. Alliances and other cooperative ventures could be fruitful. In PBM, as in life itself, 'no man is an island' and information exchange, shared goals, pooled resources and other collaborations almost invariably enrich any game. The conventions of fantasy role-playing are faithfully mirrored in CW – giving players unique opportunities to expand their favourite role types and explore an entire planet. Mages and priests are particularly well catered for with an abundance of usable spells and a proliferation of Gods, Goddesses and secret sects. As you

have a choice as to how your party of adventurers is configured, and as CW allows you to specify your party's aims and general personality, you are able to dictate, as far as possible, the style and thrust of the game you prefer to be involved with. Players who prefer to walk down paths of non-violence can develop their party in that style while lovers of conflict and mayhem will find much to keep their sword-arms busy.

Bled too offers the players a choice of 'objective roles'. You may select from Explorer (the recommended initial choice), Ruler, Trader, Warrior, Conqueror, Fanatic and Father.

Each game has its own style and identity. *Bled* is perhaps the more 'serious' in tone, the environment is alien but care has been taken to make it logical. For instance, Bled has a natural progression of years and seasons, both of which are features in the way the game is played. The combat system allows the player to specify several varying battle-modes and attack formations. Looking after and feeding your own small race of people does tend to make you feel the burden of leadership – a burden that, once accepted, will not be easy to renege on!

In CW, magic and fantasy are more important than strict realism. This world is kin to that of the hallowed traditions of adventure fantasy. Flavour and personality in a game are, in my opinion, critical to that game's success or failure. CW believes in itself, but has a smile on its face too.

To visit strange new worlds, to boldly go where no PBM player has gone before, both games offer enthralling role-playing opportunities. Players joining now, while the games are still in their comparative infancy, have an additional free bonus – their decisions, tactics and ideas could be the foundation stones upon which future game structure and development is built. Can you resist the challenge to become a history-maker, a future-shaper, an explorer and adventurer on one or both of these brave new PBM worlds? ●



Fancy your chances as a tactical commander?
JOHN GOVERTS of the Netherlands takes us into...

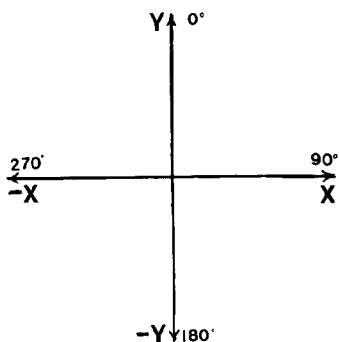
FLEET MANEUVERS

WORKING in the DP department of a large multinational company, one of my activities is reading computer magazines. In one of them, *Byte*, I found a small advertisement for Fleet Maneuvers, a computer moderated PBM game. I had been playing in Starlord for some time and had grown to like the PBM hobby, so I decided to try this game as well.

The game is run by Fantastic Simulations, by Douglas K. Latch, in Denver, USA. Writing to him I expected to be waiting for a reply for quite some time. But no, my letter was very promptly responded to, and I had been entered into one of the games. The game is clearly inspired by Star Trek, two of the ships resembling the Enterprise and a Klingon battle cruiser respectively. Recently there were some changes in ship design, however, probably to avoid copyright problems.

The rule book is called *The Starship Commander's Handbook* and consists of 15 pages of clearly written, easy-to-learn rules, with enough examples to make the mechanics of the game clear to the novice.

Fleet Maneuvers is a tactical simulation of ship-to-ship combat in deep space. Sixteen players, divided into four teams, confront each other in a game area represented by a two-dimensional cartesian plane. The up and down distances are given by the Y-coordinate and the left-right distances by the X-coordinate.



There are four races to choose from, each with their own historical backgrounds and each with their own types of starship. They are:

- The Alliance, with the class-S heavy cruiser.
- The Confederacy, with the Destiny class destroyer.
- The Donnz, a small and peace loving species, with the Defender class starship. Once provoked this race can become extremely violent.
- The Krell, with the Shadowhawk, a race devoted to the glory of war.

Each ship type has its own specific means of attack and defense, and also has its very own characteristics regarding acceleration turning rate, and even some special devices to fool the enemy. The most important property of a starship is its power-generating ability. Everything in the game is done by allocating energy units to the various devices. You allocate energy to life support systems to keep your crew alive, to the warp engines to move your ship and change its course, to weapon systems to shoot at the enemy, and to shields to prevent being blown to tiny pieces. Energy supplies are of course limited and vary from ship type to ship type.

For the purpose of course-manipulation and weapon-firing each turn is divided into ten increments. Each ship has a turning rate representing the maximum turn the ship can make in one turn. The turning rate per increment is simply one-tenth of that figure. On the orders sheet there are ten consecutive boxes in which to specify the turning rate for each increment. This may look something like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
-25	-15			-10			20	20	20

An empty box means no change in course. So, a ship starting its turn with a course of 85 degrees and these orders, will have a course of 95 (85 - 25 - 15 - 10

+20 +20 +20) degrees at the end of the turn. Knowing the ship's velocity one can calculate from the starting coordinates the point where the ship will be at the end of the turn. You can use graph paper to plot the movements of your ship; I myself use a computer programme to plot the ship's flight path.

During flight the ship may fire at opponents. There are two spaces in which to enter your firing orders, enabling you to fire twice during one turn, either during a specified increment or when the target comes within a certain range. The target must be specified by name, meaning that it must be within range of your scanners. Objects out of range are only designated by the word 'OBJECT' and these cannot be fired upon. The starships have varied weapons with differing fields of fire. There are light and heavy weapons (Cerenkov beams, disrupters, tachyon torpedoes, plasmon pursuers and self-guided target-seeking 'drones'). Each weapon requires its own quantity of energy to be fired and has its own damage-inflicting capability.

Of course you can also protect your ship from being damaged. There are four shields, each spanning 90 degrees, and each with a number of hits that it can absorb before collapsing. Each shield requires energy (of course) to be activated. Normally hits are taken by the shields, but when they have collapsed, all hits are

continued on page 25

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FLAGSHIP's fiction section starts off with an unusual Tribe of Crane...



The Singers of Crane

by William McCarthy

EXCUSE ME, Sirs. Please listen to me. No, don't push me away. I know my clothes are old and torn, I know I'm in a bad way, but I heard you call to the innkeeper for music. You like music? You must listen to me, for I was Karn, of The Brethren, and we liked music too.

Ah, you are listening, you fall silent, for you have heard of Karn, have you not? For once The Brethren strode the world like titans, and all Crane trembled at rumours of our approach. Our banners were blood-red, stained by a hundred vanquished tribes, but to each other we were loyal and compassionate, and wherever we travelled we found new recruits flocking to our call.

But one can tire even of victory. What is victory without a time of joy? When we met The Singers we took no thought of attacking them, though we could see from the opulence of their caravans that they must be successful indeed. Rather, we took this as a mark of their excellence, and we offered them double the customary rate to play for us.

Their leader, a greying man in quiet clothes, smiled and shook his head. Intrigued, we raised our offer to triple the standard rate. He declined again, and said simply, 'We do not play for pay. We play to those who we believe will appreciate us. Call your tribe together and we shall give you a night to remember.'

So we gathered The Brethren in that little clearing in the grasslands. Together came our great legions, the source of our power and our pride, their swords gleaming from the light of the moon in the clear night air - for a man of The Brethren never left his weapon behind. The Singers moved their caravans aside and stretched a stiff cloth between them to form an improvised stage. And they sang.

At first, their songs were hearty, and The Brethren laughed and cheered and called out jovially to the performers. Then the music began to change, and subtle undertones wove their pattern through the melodies. They became softer, and gentler, and each listener was drawn into the sweetest memories of his past. For myself, I looked over the rolling beauty of the great grasslands, and I asked myself why I had striven to command and conquer. Why not live as I had lived as a child, entwined in an

endless delight of everyday living, of finding new scents and new pleasures, and leaving empires to those who did not know how to *live*? I looked around, and saw with mild surprise that my neighbours were equally affected: some had laid down their weapons and were gazing about them with new eyes, others stared sightlessly into dreams of their youth.

And the songs continued, swirling ever deeper into our minds. A few rows in front of me, I saw Barck, our greatest fighter, struggling to his feet, and in a detached way I heard him shouting. Something about the singing. Something not very pleasant.

'It's a *weapon*, you fools!' he bellowed, and the words half-penetrated, fought the eddying current of music, scabbled for a foothold at the edges of my mind.

The grey singer made a sign, and the volume of their song increased, louder and louder till it was thundering out over the clearing. As Barck's great bulk fought its way to the front, I heard the words clearly for the first time:

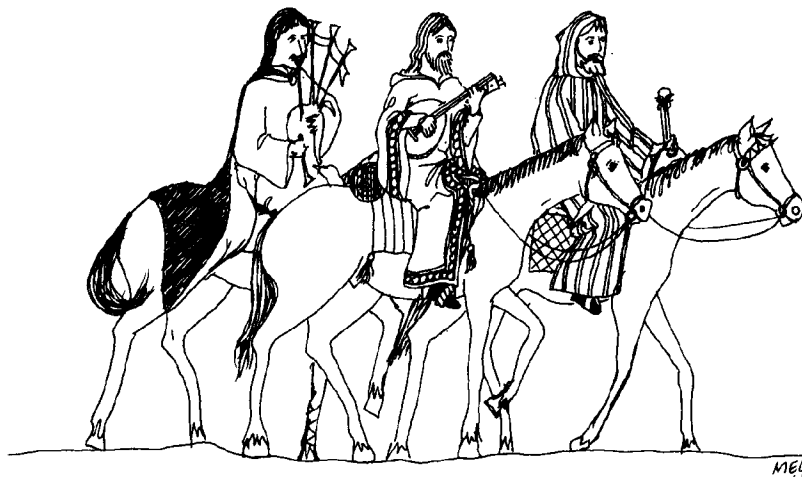
You shall not win by force of arms.
You shall not rule by sword and flame.'

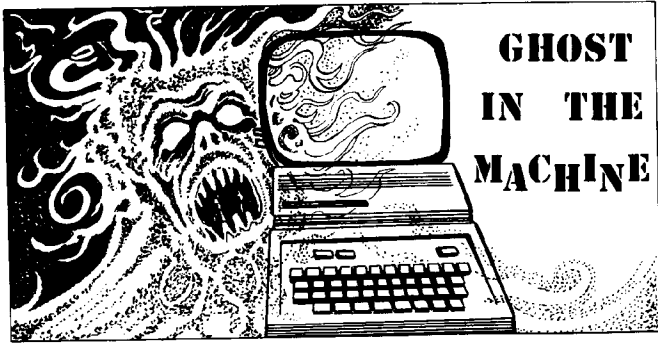
Barck's eyes were wild, he was sweating and his teeth were bared with the effort, but still he forced himself forward to reach the grey singer, who watched him calmly as the song reached its crescendo. Barck shouted again, an unintelligible, primitive howl, and plunged his sword into the singer's breast.

The grey man fell to his knees, and then to the cloth of the stage, and a slow red stain spread on the material. Then the singers turned, and they sang directly at Barck, for perhaps ten seconds they sang to him alone. Barck laid down his sword, sank onto the stage beside his enemy, and began to weep like a lost child.

In the morning, The Singers had gone. Our weapons had gone. Our fortune in gold and treasure had gone. The Brethren were finished.

Ask for wine, my friends. Ask for dancing girls. But do not ask for music, for one day music will destroy us all. ●





THIS issue's three contributors are also professionally involved with game design. John Nicholson is the man behind Vorcon Wars, a computer-moderated global conflict game which will be reviewed in detail in FLAGSHIP 2. Kevin Cropper is the creator of Crasimoff's World, reviewed by Roy Kay in Explorer's Report. Andrew Barton is a full-time game designer for the British government.

Why have computer-moderated PBM games anyway? [John Nicholson]

THERE are three broad categories of games today: board and role-playing games conducted by groups of friends, games for home computers, usually for solo use, and postal games (computer-moderated or otherwise). Why is the third category expanding so rapidly with so many games in the first two already available? The main reason is that the first two have in-built limitations, and a look at these shows the sort of games which are likely to be more successful in a PBM format.

Friendly games across the table work well if they are simple to run, easy to play, and do not require more players than you have willing friends. You don't see many games of postal Monopoly, because that works perfectly well locally. You do see a good deal of postal Diplomacy, because of the difficulty in getting seven players together and the greater scope available for skill in postal play. And when you come to a game design with a dozen or more players, face-to-face play is rarely practical at all – even if you get the players together you will spend much of the time explaining rules to one another or waiting for the GM to calculate the effects of complex player interactions.

Home computers have a good deal of potential not yet realised, in particular as game aids to make face-to-face play easier and faster. The computer can generate random dice rolls, create characters in role-playing games by interactive consultation with the player, and even be used to enhance book adventures. These adventures (e.g. the Tunnels & Trolls series) consist of a series of paragraphs with alternative actions leading to other paragraphs ('If you attack the dragon turn to 346'): if an uninvolved friend can be persuaded to enter the paragraphs into your cassettes, you can write a very simple program to run the adventure for you without the need to keep flipping through the book and avert your eyes from the 'wrong' paragraphs.

More familiar home computer games are mostly arcade-type 'action' games or adventure games which usually are essentially puzzles: once you crack the puzzle the game has little further interest. A more interesting possibility is the 'intelligent' program which changes its strategy to meet yours, like the latest chess programs, but this is difficult to achieve on a standard home computer.

The need which PBM games can fill is for relatively complex games which do not become stale with repeated play – and the best way to guarantee this is to have a large number of those unpredictable opponents, human beings! The remote GM looks after the boring administration and mundane details, letting the players get on with the fun of planning and plotting.

Why have computer-moderation, though? Because this enables the postal GM to offer a depth of play which would otherwise be impossible: numerous players, moving simultaneously, choosing from a huge range of options each turn, processed in a matter of minutes, with faultless adjudication every turn.

What human GM can offer that? So if you are thinking of designing your own computer-moderated game, make sure it fits these requirements, or you will simply be duplicating something done better face-to-face.

Designing a role-playing PBM game [Kevin Cropper]

NOT everyone realises that being a postal GM can be even more exciting and enjoyable than being a player. There is a certain fascination in seeing how differently players react to similar situations, based on the limited supply of information which you give them at the start and in response to their actions. To see how much effort a player puts into a move is very rewarding, especially if you are not only the GM but the designer of the game.

If you are considering designing your own PBM system you have probably played several postal games already and so have a pretty clear idea of the general type which interests you. First jot down the main theme and player roles. On what scale will players operate? Controlling planets? Leading a small party of explorers? Or something in between? What technology will they be able to call on? Swords? Gunpowder? Pulse lasers? Your initial choice is just about endless, though you may choose to take more than a little help from fantasy/science fiction.

Next, take several sheets of paper, divide the game up into sections, and use a separate sheet for each. Then go through each section and write fairly detailed notes on the background, the population, and any special effects available (Magic? Gods?).

Finally, add how the player fits into the situation (don't plan to fit the situation to the players, or the scenario will become incoherent as you try to twist it to accommodate each possible approach to play). Bear in mind your earlier ideas but now write the notes from the viewpoint of GM control. If you give a player the chance to do many different things each round should also keep in mind that it will take longer to process each turn – a factor which has killed off many good games as GMs became exhausted by their creations.

rulebook. Again, do this in a rough form, with plenty of space to make changes and move parts around (a word processor is useful if available). The rulebook need not be very precise, a less detailed set of rules giving the player more flexibility and freedom of action. Moreover, when you have been running the game for a while you and the players are likely to see useful improvements, and it will then be easier to add new rules than change a rigid existing structure.



Before finalizing the rulebook, you should design at least part of your game map. Quite a small area will do to start with: you can increase it later as players start to move about, and starting them in a small initial area increases the likelihood of early contacts, which are very important for player interest. As the game progresses, the players will change your details anyway by destroying planets, burning down towns, killing non-player characters, and so forth, so don't go to a lot of trouble to produce immense amounts of data in advance. This also applies to creatures, spells, artifacts, and other features of the world(s), which can all be worked out later when they are needed.

Finally, type up the rulebook and get it photocopied. If you can get this done free, that's fine – otherwise, you'll find you can achieve a considerable saving by shopping around and haggling.

One vital aspect of running your game is keeping an accurate and clear record. It does not look good if you disagree with a player's move and he can produce a contrary ruling from a previous turn. You may find that it is well worth time keeping copies of some types of reports to the players to keep the position clear and speed processing of turns.

This article is based on hindsight, looking back on the development of Crasimoff's World and its various updates. If you decide to design your own game, I hope it will help smooth your path, and that you will have as much fun designing and running your game as I have had with mine.

Designing a computer-moderated game [Andrew Barton]

Kevin's article deals with the game design side of PBM games. Here I want to look at the computer implementation side, using Starlord as the example since this is one of the most advanced games from the point of view of input and output.

The DDT approach

The design of a game should pass through three phases

- Design
- Develop
- Test

and skimping on any of these will lead to an inferior final product. The temptation is always to rush into writing rules or hacking code, but this is a recipe for wasted effort if you have not thought out first what you are trying to do.

Design

The first design task is to answer the question:

What is the game about?

Possible themes for PBM games include:

- Exploration
- Battle
- Diplomacy
- Trade

This is not to say that if one of these is the theme the others will be totally absent, but an attempt to represent all of these in full detail is likely to fail. As an example, Diplomacy concentrates on inter-player reaction with extremely basic rules for combat. Starlord is an interesting example of a game with elements of three of the above themes. The designer here chose to use simple mechanics for battle, with only one type of fighting unit, and to make exploration a matter of discovering stars from a limited number of standard types. The result is a game with a flavour curiously like the Napoleonic wars at a strategic level, with the emphasis on the manoeuvre of forces rather than tactical detail.

The next question to ask is:

What resources are available for developing the game, and for running the finished product?

For computer-based games it is a good idea to start thinking early on about how the players' decisions will get into the computer. The machine can print out large quantities of output with little supervision but input is going to need personal attention from an operator. The challenge is to come up with a set of player options which can give a rich choice of possible moves but can be entered into the computer as a few words or

numbers. Starlord achieves this very neatly, by giving the player a computer-generated form with boxes for only those moves which are legal on his current turn, the entries being simple numbers.

Output is a bit different. In the same time it takes to type in a few lines of instructions from a player's order form the machine can be printing out a couple of pages of maps and reports, perhaps in colour or with fancy symbols.

Development

This is the stage where your concepts are brought to the point where you can try them out and see whether they work in practice. It is tempting to bring in new ideas during this stage but if you put in every bright idea you come up with during coding the game is liable to expand beyond reason and lose its shape.

It is here that good design work will bear fruit. If the concepts of your game are clear then putting flesh on the bones will be a straightforward process.

Structured programming is good practice in development, whether the game is computerised or not. One can divide the game into modules with defined links between them, produce simplified versions of each to allow testing of the overall concept, then develop each section more fully without needing to amend the others in the process.

Testing

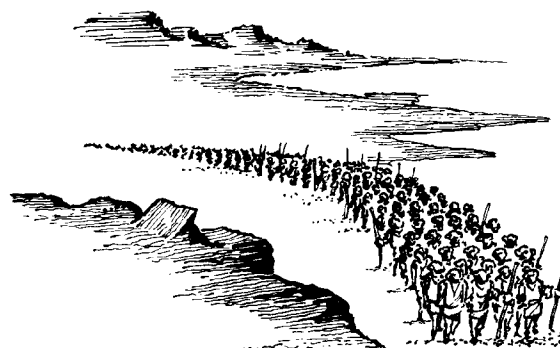
This is where most people fall down. Avalon Hill consider their Waterloo game a good simulation of the campaign because players who make the historical moves get something like the historical result. The trouble is that if you play the game with different strategies the results can be decidedly unhistorical and sometimes totally silly. The game must not only work when the players act as you expect them to but also when they make bad or silly moves – or good ones that you haven't thought of!

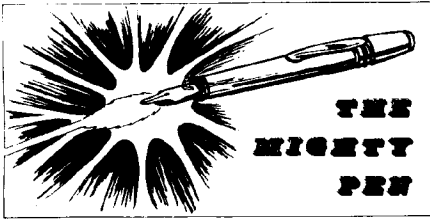
An example of a similar fault is found in the rules of Kingmaker, which provide for up to 23 players. The designer had never actually tried it with more than six. In fact as soon as you play with more than seven the whole nature of the game changes and play bogs down. In the course of testing, more new ideas are likely to come up. These sometimes make all the difference to a game, but be sure that you have tested the results of the changes.

Once you and your friends are convinced that the game works and handles everything you can throw at it, the final test is the blind-test. Send someone the rules of the game and get them to play it without any guidance from you except that provided by the game itself. At this stage you will probably find that all sorts of things that you have been taking for granted are not at all obvious to someone with only the written rules to go on. Unless you plan on giving personal support to every play of the game, you must make the written rules adequate. It may take several tries because clearing up one point is likely to produce new ambiguities. All in all, if you follow the above counsels of perfection you will spend more time on the testing phase than on the other two put together. The reward for this will come in the finished product.

The Game's the Thing

There is one more requirement for a game to work – IT MUST BE FUN. ●





CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

We suggest you use this facility to contact other players in your games. Any FLAGSHIP *subscriber* is entitled to a free 15-word classified ad. Further words (and all words for non-subscribers) are 15c or 10p; heavy type is 22c/15p. Or you can advertise at \$7.50 or £5 semi-display per single column inch.

READ 30+ pages of articles, reviews, letters; PLAY Diplomacy, Snits Revenge, Sopwith, Origins, Nuclear War, Machiavelli and other games in THE ACOLYTE, 40p/\$1 from Pete Tamlyn, 2 Poplar Rd., The Coppice, Aylesbury, Bucks., England HP22 5BN.

ALCOHOLIC, DART-PLAYING, GERIATRIC members of the Diplomacy fraternity might find *Mercurius Aulicus* to their liking. To find out, write to Paul McGivern, 11 Airedale, Wallsend on Tyne, England.

FEEDBACK

Like any new magazine, we want to know what you like and want to see more of, and what you don't like and want to see less of! We'd like to ask you to send us your views on the following, to the editor (see editorial address page 3). Rate the issue as a whole from 0 (terrible) to 10 (terrific).

ARTICLES

1. Which article did you like best?
2. Which did you like second best?
3. Which did you like least?

ARTWORK

4. Do you like the cover?
5. Do you like the internal artwork?

SECTIONS

Would you like to see (a) more (b) the same (c) less space given to:

6. Professional Secrets
7. Explorer's Report
8. Ghost in the Machine
9. The Spokesmen Speak
10. The Mighty Pen (assume normal size now is one page)
11. Traveller's Tales
12. Galactic View

YOUR INTERESTS

13. Which games do you now play by mail?
14. Which game would you most like to see covered in a major feature article?

We appreciate you taking the time to advise us. On January 1 1984 we shall take all replies received and send the next two issues *free* to the first chosen at random (if you already have a subscription, it will be extended by two issues).

Feel free to give us any views not covered by the questionnaire, either on the magazine or your games experiences - we'll be printing interesting, unusual and controversial views in future issues under THE MIGHTY PEN, and whatever you write will help us decide how to make FLAGSHIP fit your interests.

SPECIAL OFFERS TO FLAGSHIP READERS

As a reader of FLAGSHIP you are entitled to discounts from many of the PBM companies who want to encourage our development as a major magazine for the whole hobby. Cut out the coupons below and send them with any *new* game applications (you cannot use them for game positions you have already started). See GALACTIC VIEW and THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK for lists of games from each company.

FLYING BUFFALO INCORPORATED

Free rules package
(normal price \$5)

CLEMENS AND ASSOCIATES

One free turn in any
new Clemens game

ICBM

Free start-up and one free
turn in any new ICBM game

STARLORD

One free turn in any
new UK game

VORCON WARS

£1 or \$1 off start-up fee

MITREGAMES

£1.50 off start-up fee for
Starmaster or Tribes of
Crane

KEYS OF BLEED

One extra free turn

SCHUBEL & SON

\$1 off set-up fee for Arena,
Conflict or Alien Conflict

K.J.C. GAMES

One free turn of
Crasimoff's World



THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK...

NOTE: this section is for official press releases from the PBM companies. We may shorten and paraphrase them but we will not evaluate them: we think you want to hear what they have to say directly. We do not take responsibility for any claims made.

CLEMENS & ASSOCIATES (US)

We have been running for over four years and currently offer three games. The oldest is Universe II; at the beginning of the year we came out with Terra II, a medieval era game with quite detailed economic and military system; a few months ago we added Conquest of Insula II, which is also set in the medieval period, but has a fixed duration and greater emphasis on military campaigns.

We have just finished adding many new Universe II features, including new ship types, research stations, colony equipment, and various devices. A new US quadrant opened in September, and new UK and Australian quadrants are under consideration.

ADVENTURES BY MAIL (US)

Phoenix Research and Design of Louisiana will be using their new state-of-the-art computer system to produce Adventures By Mail's next large-scale PBM role-playing game.

We have conducted a playtest with over

100 players of our new game CAPITOL. This is the largest playtest ever attempted by a commercial PBM company: we want to call attention to the value of a complete, impartial playtest in the development of a quality PBM game.

CAPPS & CAPPS (US)

Galac-Tac PBM has been our first and only PBM game hitherto, but September saw the launch of our new game, WARLORD PBM! This is a fantasy adventure game of conquest and has combat handled by the WARLORD™ miniatures system.

ICBM (UK)

We are now running about 30 UK games of StarWeb (10-15 players in each), as well as Terra II, Universe II, and (so far) seven games of Galactic Conquest. We are now launching Conquest of Insula II and Feudal Lords. We hope to reduce prices on Galactic Conquest to £1 a turn (from £1.50) as soon as we have the new launches out of the way.

VORCON WARS (UK)

We are now into game 15, with constant new game starts, including two quick-return games for fast players. We have had numerous requests from other countries and so will shortly be starting the first international game.

In addition, there are two new games on the way. One is still being written, but The Roman Conquest of Britain (working title) is now going through a thorough playtest. This is a realistic scenario set in 54 BC, just after Caesar's second invasion. Players can take either Romans or Britons, and the game portrays terrain, towns, villages and even superstitions. Beware, though: there is no fantasy aspect, and the game is only for serious players. Look out for adverts in coming FLAGSHIPS.

K.J.C. GAMES (UK)

We have brought out a new rule book and started a newsletter for Crasimoff's World, which is increasing rapidly in popularity after an advertising campaign. There are now over 250 parties, with about 25 more joining each month. Rights may soon be sold for separate Australia/New Zealand games, and we shall soon be launching a second game and hiring a second full-time GM.

Kevin Cropper, owner of K.J.C. Games, has joined the board of Mitre Wargames: we expect close cooperation between the two companies in the future.

MITRE WARGAMES (UK)

We now have 400 tribes and 100 political positions running in Tribes of Crane, with 100 races in Starmaster; we expect big expansion, particularly in Starmaster which has received little advertising or coverage in the press up to now. We have two full-time GMs to meet demand, and are now launching a Starmaster newsletter to accompany our existing Crane newsletter.

BALROG ADVENTURES (UK)

We are at present a part-time operation with the only game at present being Warboid World, but plans are afoot to introduce a brand new postal game of space exploration, incorporating advanced rules which take effect later in the game. We are working on the idea of cheap fast-turnaround games to be run by direct link to players' home computers.

SCHUBEL & SON (US)

We now have 12 employees and around 2000 players, and process more turns per month than any other PBM company. Our latest game is Global Supremacy, a GM-moderated, realistic, WWII-type wargame.

FLEET MANEUVERS

continued from page 20

directed to the ship itself, causing the percentage damage figure to increase. When the figure reaches 100 the ship is destroyed. Hits on enemy ships (or starbase) will give you and your team points to add to your total score. The first team to reach the target score wins the game. The target score is set by the players themselves: when entering the game you give your chosen end score and the target score is simply the average of all 16 figures. It is kept secret.

When your ship is damaged you can try to reach the starbase to repair or to reload your weapons. Each team has its own starbase which has its own defensive systems and five heavy Cerenkov beams to protect itself. It is run by computer; team members have no influence on its actions (or lack thereof). Taking the enemy's starbase will add 100 points to the team score and will of course prevent any enemy ship repair. But starbases can only be taken by careful, coordinated team action.

With your orders sheet you can send communications cards. You simply write the name of your ship and of the recipient ship or race on one side, and your message on the other. The Fantastic Simulations

people will take care that the message is delivered.

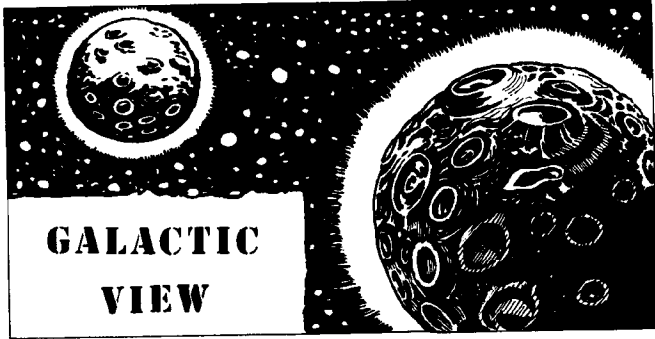
The key element in Fleet Maneuvers is communications. Members of the same team will exchange home addresses very early in the game. And then there's also the possibility of forming a pact with another team; there's room enough for diplomacy in Fleet Maneuvers.

What does it cost? In the original game, a turn costed 3 dollars, but recently the price dropped to \$2.50. What do you get? Players receive a turn results sheet, a computer printout giving the ship's status, and the positions of your starbase, team mates, and enemy ships within sensor range. You also get a new orders form to fill in your next turn, an issue of Fantastic Simulation's newsletter, and any communications cards that were sent to you. When entering the game you are requested to give your chosen end score, your preference for the race you wish to play and the name of your ship. It is possible to enter the game as a team if you have three friends who also want to play. It is even possible to have Fantastic Simulations start a private game if you have 15 friends who want to play.

The game I played in lasted for 8 turns. The team I played in was an Alliance team; the other three members were in the US.

Immediately after the game start we exchanged our addresses, but due to the geographical distance, communication was sometimes difficult, letters not arriving in time for the deadline (turn around time normally being 4 weeks). Sometimes I just had to guess what our team captain would advise, and of course sometimes I was wrong, ending up isolated from the other team members. My ship, bearing the name of a famous Japanese warrior, was the first to go into battle on three occasions. The third one, in turn 7, turned out to be disastrous; the ship went down in flames. But by that time we had already destroyed two Confederates and were chasing a third. Turn 8 was the last one of this game, because the Donnz, whom we never even met, took the Krell starbase. Our team took the third Confederate in that turn, and both the Donnz and the Alliance went beyond the target score, but the Donnz had more points, so they won.

In my opinion Fleet Maneuvers is worth trying at least once, and after my unfortunate demise in the first game I will most certainly enter another, with three friends this time to form an all-Dutch fleet. And recently Fantastic Simulations created a three-dimensional version of the game which - from reading the rule books - looks even more fun. ●



FLAGSHIP's game-finding service: where to go and what it costs

This is a broad though not quite complete list of PBM companies now offering games. For details of many of these, see THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK.

US

Adventures By Mail, PO Box 436, Cohoes, NY 12047
 Adventures Design Group Inc., PO Box 821072, Dallas, TX 75382
 Big City Inc., PO Box 1804, Eugene, OR 97440
 Capps & Capps, PO Box 280237, Dallas, TX 75228
 (Tel 214/681-0325)
 Central Texas Computing, 710-S, Southwest Tower, Austin, TX 78701
 Clemens & Associates, PO Box 4539, San Clemente, CA 92672
 Entertainment Concepts Inc., PO Box 13190, Charlotte, NC 28211
 Fantastic Simulations, PO Box 24566, Denver, CO 80224
 Flying Buffalo Inc., PO Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252-1467
 (Tel 602/966-4727)
 Games Systems Inc., PO Box 430587, Miami, FL 33143

Graef Simulations, 27530 Harper, St Clair Shores, MI 48081
 Otto Schmidt II, RD4, Box 381, Newton, NJ 07860
 Rick Barr, PO Box 1873, Cave Creek, AZ 85331
 Schubel & Son Inc., PO Box 214848, Sacramento, CA 95821
 Space Heroes, 1824 Yorktown Rd, Lexington, KY 40504
 Superior Simulations, PO Box 505, Fairfield, Idaho 83327
 Viking Games Inc., 5500 Closeburn Rd, Charlotte, NC 28210
 Zorph Enterprises, 3646 Gibsonia Rd, Gibsonia, PA 15044

UK

Balrog Adventures, 39 Chapman Ave, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8EJ
 (Tel 0622-61210)
 ICBM, PO Box 94, Bath St, Walsall, West Midlands
 K.J.C. Games, 5 Vicarage Avenue, Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 2BD.
 (Tel 0253-853040)
 Keys of Bled, 95 King St, Ramsgate, Kent
 Mitrgames, 77 Burntwood Grange Rd, Wandsworth Common,
 London SW18
 Starlord, 1 Rake Hey Close, Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside L46 6EW
 Vorcon Wars, 71 Juniper, Birch Hill, Bracknell, Berks

The following is a list of games referred to in articles in this issue, cross-referenced to the companies above, with a guide to prices. Please note:

- (1) While we believe prices to be correct as we go to press, they may have changed by the time you read the magazine.
- (2) Most games offer a starter package, giving you the rules and some free turns: the cost of this, and how many free turns (not including setup turns) you get, is shown separately from the standard turn fee.
- (3) When a stamped addressed envelope is required, the cost of the stamp has been added to the turn fee.
- (4) The special offers to FLAGSHIP readers mentioned elsewhere are not included, so the price to *you* may be less if you use the appropriate coupon.
- (5) We feel the table gives some interesting comparisons. However, the price does not give an indication of game quality - see the articles for that - nor of speed of GMing. Since the games differ widely in type, turnaround speed, and complexity, direct comparisons of game fees should be interpreted with caution!

Game	US players contact...	US prices (dollars)				UK prices (pounds)				
		Rules & startup	Free turns	Turn fee	Other fees	UK players contact...	Rules & startup	Free turns	Turn fee	Other fees
Crasimoff's World	KJC Games	10.00	4	2.50	1.20(b)	As US	5.00	4	1.25	0.75(b)
Empyrean Challenge	Superior Sim	20.00*	1	5.00	(x)	As US	As US+\$2.50 postage (\$ only)			
Fleet Maneuvers	Fantastic Sim	15.00	6	2.50	None	As US	As US (\$ only)			
Keys of Bled	Keys of Bled	Free	4	2.25	None	As US	Free	4	1.50	None
Starlord	Flying Buffalo	6.00	0	2.50	None	Starlord	Free	0	1.25	None
Starweb	Flying Buffalo	20.50*	3	3.50	(y)	ICBM	3.00*	0	1.81	None
Tribes of Crane	Schubel	10.50	2	3.50	(z)	Mitre	6.50	4	1.50	(z)
Universe II/III	Clemens/Central Texas	7.00	1	3.00	None	ICBM	1.00	0	1.91	None
Vorcon Wars	Vorcon Wars	2.50	3	1.75	None	As US	1.50	3	1.00	None
Warboid World	Adventures By Mail	20.00*	3	3.50	None	Balrog	9.00*	3	1.75	None

* Includes deposit returnable if you play to the end

(b) Charge for battle report when battles occur

(x) Turn fee is \$5.00 or 20c/ship or colony or 5c/order, whichever is most

(y) US Starweb fees rise by 50c every 10 turns to reflect the larger forces the player is likely to control

(z) Tribes of Crane has a wide variety of possible actions beyond the basic turn, which have a variety of separate charges

COMING NEXT TIME!

STARMASTER TERRA II COMPARING GM STYLES ... and much more!

WRITE FOR FLAGSHIP

FLAGSHIP welcomes contributions! Articles and artwork should be submitted to the editor; articles should be typed double-spaced. To avoid disappointment, you may like to write first to check that your theme has not already been done by someone else. Material which cannot be used will be returned if a self-addressed envelope is provided (no stamp necessary). Printed material will be paid for at a minimum rate of \$7.50/£5 per 1000 words or per drawing. We also need reviewers to play new games and review them for FLAGSHIP: usually they will get these games *free*.

THE EAGLES OF BLED SEND CONGRATULATIONS TO NICKY PALMER AND FLAGSHIP

THE KEYS OF BLED

THE KEYS OF BLED is a play-by-mail experience set on an archaic and anarchic fantasy world. As a participant, you will have to account for the supply of your people, their morale & combat ability, your own political leadership rating and many other inter-related factors.

The game system embraces multiple group control, each of which is able to act independently of the others, a combat system which allows you to deploy individual units prior to combat actually taking place, assigning both objectives & risk levels on a detailed combat resolution sheet, and more detailed gamesmaster scene-setting than usual.

To enable you to more fully assess the merits of the game, a free rulebook, describing the game system, can be obtained from:

THE KEYS OF BLED (F), 95 King Street, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 8NZ

Subsequently, your first four turns are also free of charge. Thereafter, turns cost £1.50 or \$2.75, though there are a number of advance purchase options which substantially reduce the overall cost to the player.

STAR MASTER

THE TRIBES OF CRANE

Whether it's the excitement of alien races in the vast reaches of outer space . . . or the thrill of tribal intrigue, trade and combat on another planet . . . **MITREGAMES** offers the best in play by mail gaming. **STARMASTER** is a game of galactic exploration, diplomacy, and conquest, in which you begin by designing your own race. **THE TRIBES OF CRANE** is set in a beautiful, intriguing planet of fertile plains and myriad seas - you are a tribe struggling for wealth, strength - and survival! All turns processed in under a week.

STARMASTER costs £7.50 to start (including rulebook and the first two turns). Each additional turn costs £1.50

THE TRIBES OF CRANE costs £6.50 to start (including rulebook and the first four turns). Each additional turn costs £1.50

For further details, write to:



MITREGAMES

Lothlorien
77 Burntwood Grange
Wandsworth Common
London SW18
Tel: 01-870 1290

US players contact Schubel & Son, Sacramento, California 95821

BALROG ADVENTURES

The UK moderators of the highly successful computer moderated postal game

Warboid World

would like to welcome readers to the first issue of Flagship and wish Nicky Palmer and his team the best of luck with the magazine

Special promotion offer to readers of FLAGSHIP. Tell us where you read about us when you request a game and we will include your special message to other reader/players in our dedicated spot in a subsequent issue, any time after your game is under way. Up to 12 words plus your real or code name. We will forward replies to you with your turn printouts. A good way of sending "to whom it may concern" type messages to players you want to tell something, but don't know their identity.

Warboid World

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As reviewed in

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37

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