FLAGSHIP

THE MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS

Supernova III

Austerlitz
Bean Trader
Clansmen
Lord of the Rings CCG
Lords of the Earth
Monsters
Pirates of the Caribbean
The Globalisation of PBM
The Online Revolution
Wasteland of Flint

plus ...

**Board & Card Games,
Computer Games, Roleplaying,
Conventions and Zine Scene ...**

... and all the gaming news, views & reviews!

Fun Times

SO DID YOUR summer holidays pass well? - we hope so, as many of you have been away enjoying the sunshine. I could pretend that instead of lounging in deckchairs we've spent the whole summer working away to bring you this issue, but that's maybe a slight exaggeration. Our office has remained open, however, despite the tempting weather, and we're proud to present you with a *Flagship 104* that's full of good things. Our thanks to all those who've stayed cool and sober for long enough to contribute.

We're covering all sorts of games here, as usual, and we've some lively writers to describe them. It's good to see that you seem to be enjoying their contributions. No-one likes every game that's out there, so we do believe that a personal approach gives us all the best way to see what games are like to play. You can judge what a writer likes and whether what he's describing suits you.

One innovative feature for this issue is that we're proud to present the special offer of *a free game of Total Conquest* for our readers. We'll be thrilled if you let us know how you get on when you take this offer up: it's not compulsory, but it's a way to repay the moderators for their generosity and it will show us all a variety of approaches to the game.

We also have a competition with *signed books by Thomas Harlan* as stunning prizes.

Not bad as opportunities, eh? Along with lots of reviews, news, players' comments and tempting advertisements, there's plenty here to whet your appetites for a fun time ahead.

One of the joys of editing *Flagship* is that it's possible to see how games firms are preparing to attract players for the weeks to come, and to learn that games launched earlier in the year are growing as they maintain their popularity. Older games, too, are supported with enthusiasm, as they should be. Games firms are run by creative people wishing to provide us all with fun: they're inspiring to cover in these pages.

Above all, it's your reactions to the games you play that matter. We know that we reflect these here, and again it's always fascinating to receive your comments.

We've some controversial articles and comments too, of course: where would Flagship be without an element of controversy? It's not my job to print only the views that I agree with, but to reflect the concerns of an intelligent readership. If you disagree with anything here or want to raise a new subject, write with your own opinions: we'll be glad to include them.

Finally, a concern about something that may never happen. After running late with issue 103 because I broke my wrist, we're well on schedule with issue 104. At least, we are at the time of writing. However, talk of a postal strike causes some anxiety. While most of your PBM game turns won't be affected because so many of you play by email, we're hoping that your copies of *Flagship* won't be delayed en route.

Have a fun time!

Carol

IN THIS ISSUE ...

FEATURES

REGULAR DEPARTMENTS

**Contributions welcomed for Flagship 105. By October 9th, please.**

Newsdesk PBM

WE HOPE you've all had a fun summer holiday. These news columns are being put together as the sun beats down. No doubt the weather will have changed by the time this issue lands on your doormat. Time to think of improving your game-playing rather than keeping cool?

A brief word about our policy in assembling Newsdesk. As is our habit with the magazine as a whole, we print all the PBM/PBEM news we receive: other news tends to be rather more selective. There is a staggering amount of gaming news out there and we can but report the tip of the iceberg - also we try not to duplicate the news reported by our regular columnists such as Pevans and Globetrotter.

Wargames
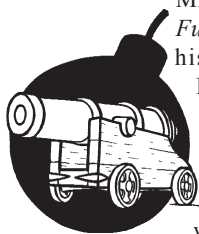
Mike Absolom of *Tempus Fugit PBM* confirms that his playtest game of **LTWars** is continuing, and thanks his players for 'their boundless enthusiasm, relentless bug hunting and welcome creativity.' LTWars is set in the London Underground system, with gangs jostling for power there after the city above has been destroyed: a clever concept. It was originally designed and run by Spellbinder Games, but when Mike took the game over he decided to run a free playtest at first, so that he could familiarise himself with the game and update it in consultation with its players. He says that he's made too many updates to list, both fixes and in-game developments, and that there are plenty more enhancements still to come. 'The game itself is becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex.'

There are several *free* positions for playtest #2. Interested players should contact Mike at *enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk*

Jason Oates announces the new game of **Company Commander**, game 11. Playable by mail or email, Company Commander is a modern battle game set in a third world country. You take control of one of the factions which are fighting for dominance, and seek to gain control of the whole country, with the other players as your opponents or your allies. You recruit your men, and train them: there are hundreds of different weapons to be obtained from arms dealers and the black market. Your infantry units are squads, and your vehicles are individual units. Plenty of detail, then for wargaming readers: *jason.oates@virgin.net*

Fantasy Wargames

On October 1st 2003 the fantasy war PBeM **Total Conquest** will be celebrating its first year since its commercial release. The GMs report that they've gained a loyal and enthusiastic base of players who 'never stop suggesting improvements and additions to the game', and that they're aiming to satisfy as many of these suggestions as possible.

During the summer they've ben hard at work. The entire army list (for Elves, Dwarves, Human, Orcs and all minor races) has been revised, changing troop types for game balance and material costs, while increasing the effects of terrain; additions were made to the engine that improved gameplay; some bugs in the magic and quest system have been corrected. The entire website has been upgraded, with a new dynamic front page that includes company news and announcements, new games starting and statistical information for top players and games, all updated automatically every day. The player account management system has also been improved, both in its appearance and ease of use. Certain minro peoblems have been removed from the graphical user interface, and new orders that were not available before can now be given with the 'click and drag' system.

New scenarios for 10 and 16 players have been created, custom games have been further enhanced, new artwork has been purchased, and many other minor changes and additions were made throughout the system to enhance game play.

It's good to hear that this new game is thriving!

support@total-coquest.com

Note, too, that the TC team is making a special offer for Flagship readers: see below for details.

SPECIAL OFFER

The moderators of the fantasy PBeM **Total Conquest** are making an exciting special offer for *Flagship* readers.

They're planning to start a new game of **Total Conquest** for *Flagship* readers only, which will be *completely free*. Yes, you play for free and you're under no obligation to continue after the game ends. Furthermore, even though no fees will be involved, the winners *will* gain 500 credits to continue playing in other **Total Conquest** games and gain an entry in the website's Hall of Fame.

This gives you the chance to compete against fellow *Flagship* readers who will also be new to the game, rather than **Total Conquest** veterans. We'd love to run an ongoing account about how your individual positions are getting along, so if you're willing to join in this then send your reports on the game to *Flagship*'s office address.

There's room for 30 players, with places allocated on a first-come first-served basis. Be quick to apply, before the game fills up! All you have to do to play is mention that you saw the offer in this issue for **the TC-Flagship game**. Everything else you need to play can be downloaded from the website at no cost.

To book a place, email: *silver@total-conquest.com*

For more information about the special offer or the game in general write to *support@total-coquest.com* or visit the website at *www.total-conquest.com*

Incubus Designs started their 22nd game of **Serim Ral** on the 31st of July, as an Ocean Lords themed game. Ocean Lords is set among the numerous small islands that litter the Endless Ocean, and players started with a budding empire that included a castle, several heroic explorers, a menagerie of monsters and some longships. From such a base, they can choose their own destiny: exploring, trading and allying with or fighting their neighbours.

Admittedly it's too late to join this game now, but it's good to see that there's plenty of vigour in their version of Serim Ral, and you can check their website for details of the next game they'll run: *www.incubusdesigns.com*

Harlequin Games have been busily reorganising themselves, dealing with the changes brought about by the **Legends** takeover. A lot of the work has involved the sort of code recompiling that's mainly of interest to the Legends GMs round the world.

Still, there have been some developments of interest to the community of Legends players. It is a game of enormous potential, so it's good to hear of it being revised and developed. Harlequin's Sam Roads been working with a group of expert players to redesign important game features. The armour and training types have been overhauled, removing those with limited strategic benefits and tweaking them to allow for fighting in more unusual terrains and situations.

In the past, Illusionists and Sorcerers have been less popular to play, so they're being given their own troop types to match

Newsdesk PBM

the Warlocks' Fey Knights. The Illusionists get Blur Rangers - invisible scouts designed for hit and run guerilla warfare - with great chances of surprise in battles and moving undetected. These troops will also probably allow for more use of the Raiding set of military orders, which currently are less effective than the 'big stick' Conquer military orders. The Sorcerers' troop type haven't been named, but in keeping with their famous Ego Attack spell, they will have an excellent Special Attack, with little else to commend them. They'll be cheap to produce, with low morale and defences, useful for an untrained and poorly equipped army.

The 300+ spell list is getting a much needed overhaul. The spells which have been cast infrequently are getting boosted, or refocussed, while the potboilers are being gently downgraded. This will add to the diversity within the game and allow for more tactics and paths to military success.

Harlequin are still accepting setups for *Immortals' Realm* and *Twilight Crusade*, both games having passed the 80-player mark. Hurry to sign up if you're interested in either of these, as Harlequin will close them down to new players around the 100-player mark. They expect that the Legends game that they'll release afterwards will be a short turnaround Twilight Crusade, with alternative faction rules.

pbm@harlequingames.com

Middle Earth PBM is run from the Harlequin offices in Cardiff, but they call themselves *MiddleEarth Games* for this - and the hot news is that they will soon become *MiddleEarth Games Ltd*. It's a big step in their development as a gaming company.

Middle Earth PBM is, of course, a game that can attract new players by its very subject matter, and the firm has been working hard on this by attending a wide range of conventions: roleplaying, boardgaming, wargaming and many others including EuroGencon earlier this year and USGencon.

They report that their players hover around the 700 mark and that they're soon to release the Middle Earth Mapping program (aka *Palantir*), an aid to the collation and planning of turns in Middle Earth PBM.

There's a letter in Mighty Pen which should arouse some interest, and they exclaim that 'basically we are so bursting with ideas to develop PBM that we can hardly sit still. Enthusiastic? Yes!'

RPG Games

Mike Absolom of *Tempus Fugit PBM* reports that his waiting list for places in **Saturnalia, The South** is empty once more. Play is *free* in this area of the classic roleplaying game.

Interested? Contact Mike at: *enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk*

Superhero Games

Here's some exciting news: *Madhouse* are starting the beta test for their latest PBM game, **Abnormals**. It's an open-ended roleplaying game set in an immense city in an alternative Earth, where all sorts of bizarre events have triggered challenges that only super-powered game characters can tackle.

The game uses Madhouse's NeXus game engine, One interesting element is that while solo play will be possible, team play will be encouraged. Madhouse plan to let you play a basic character for free even after the game is launched commercially, with more advanced options available to the paying customers.
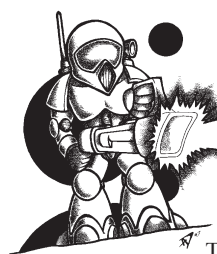
Interested? There's a special Yahoo discussion group for the playtest where you can learn about the game, ask questions and make suggestions at:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ abnormalspbm

Otherwise, information can be found on Madhouse's website at:

www.madcentral.com/abnormals

SciFi Games

KJC Games confirm that their new game **Phoenix** is taking off. They even have a few celebrities playing: Jerry Pournelle (*Mote in God's Eye* and co-writer on a lot of Larry Niven stuff) has joined the Felini along with Martin Heller (Senior Consultant Editor on *Byte Magazine*).

KJC's Mica is confident that they have hammered out most of the game now and simply adding bells and whistles such as infrastructure/plagues and some more agents stuff. They even have a new order editor (the beta editor) which scans turns and pulls data into the data base. Wow - are they spoiling

their players?

Mica reports that 'there was a little skirmish last week - at least I thought it was until I checked the statistics - more than 140 individual ships entered the fray, beating the best ever BSE record by 15 ships. Not bad for the first six months of the new game. I shudder to think what the future holds...'

Phoenix is free to start and the basic starship position can be played for free. It has affiliations which support new players, while having the depth that will retain their interest:

http://www.kjcgames.com/phoenix

Flying Buffalo Inc now offer preview turns for email players in all versions of their classic game, **Starweb**. If you send your orders by email before 9am on the deadline day, you can receive a turn result that shows only your orders and error messages, so you've a chance to correct them before FBI finally process the game. It'll be a useful service. And yes, FBI are removing the chance of it being abused: note that only the first worlds of longer move orders will be checked, so it's not going to be possible to use this new preview system to gain additional information:

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Adventure Games
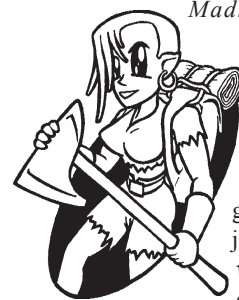
Madhouse have added coverage of the **Dungeonworld** Guilds to their website. Well worth checking if you're playing the game or thinking of joining it: *www.madcentral.com/ dungeonworld/ guilds/home.htm*

Bat of KJC Games reports that a new version of the **Quest** rulebook is currently being proof-read by some of the players. A summary of party versus party fights is now given. Several Alliances have reached Rank 3 in moderation. Rank 3 allows Alliances to get an overview of the settlement and organisation they work with, allowing the Alliance members to get involved in more politics.

Other aspects of Quest are in development too, and we'll report on these as they come into effect.

Newsdesk PBM

Sports Games

Dave Scriven is starting the new season with his horse-racing game, **Horses for Courses: Epsom**. Apply soon if you fancy playing as the game will fill up quickly. The startup is £10 and includes the first five turns, while the turn fee has increased to £2.40. This is a postal game, and Dave's address is in *Galactic View*.

Arena Games

New from *Entertainment Plus More Inc* is a PBeM game called **Deathsgate Arena**. It's part of their **Adventurers Guild** game world, but Deathsgate Arena can be played on its own as a separate module, to offer you a multiplayer game of gladiatorial combat. It's run with two-week turns, and there's a free trial turn to start off with. The charge of $6 for subsequent turns gets you seven battle fights, a challenge fight, six extra actions and two special actions.

Entertainment plus More are also making a special offer of three free trial turns to players of **Duelmaster**:

www.epmgames.com

Firms

Congratulations to Mrs and Mrs Harper! Rob Harper and Sarah Callaghan married on August 2nd. Rob will be familiar to many PBMers for his long service to them with *State of Mind Games*. Our best wishes for a long and happy married life.

Following the successful launch of their science fiction game **Phoenix**, *KJC Games* are working on designs for not one, not two, but *three* new games. Exciting stuff! We'll be saying more about their progress in future issues ...

Adventures By Mail have given up running **Quest** for the American market. *KJC* invite any US players who want to continue playing it to contact them: they can chose either the standard version of the game, or the newer version with hand-moderation.

www.kjcgames.com

Madhouse have revamped their online payments page and are making various special offers for advance payments using the PayPal system. You'll need a credit card, of course: *www.madcentral.com/turnfees.htm*

Madhouse also confirm that work is continuing on **Night Of The Things**, as a live online multiplayer game, and **Zombie Holocaust**, an arcade-style game which will soon be in beta test. We'll be reporting on them here, of course, but meanwhile you can follow the website to stay up to date with Night Of The Things.

www.madcentral.com/nightofthethings

Your feedback comments have been praising last issue's cover. Both our front and back covers were taken from artwork designed for *Harlequin Games*. Harlequin report that they were delighted by Danny Willis's picture used on the front, which Danny had produced for their new **Legends** module, *Twilight Crusade*. Harlequin's ad on the back cover was taken from artwork they've commissioned for *Immortals' Realm* from a talented UK artist they met at EuroGenCon, Anne Stokes.

Anne has also produced a new interpretation of Harlequin's logo, as well as the cover for the forthcoming **Middle-Earth** Source Book. A nice development is that Harlequin are planning to organise a vote on their website for which logo is more popular...

KJC Games are postponing their plan to start a (very) big game of **It's A Crime**, which would need 500 players. There's been an increase in interest in playing the game, however, so they're starting games 37 and 38 as standard games so that applicants won't need to wait for the big game (#36) to fill. There are now places available.

It's A Crime is a game of gang warfare in an American city, that was designed to be fun for beginners. If you're interested in joining, check:

www.kjcgames.com/crsetup.htm

Convention Reports

GM **Sam Roads** describes *Harlequin*'s recent **Amsterdam Pubmeet**:

'I went to Amsterdam for a day of glorious sunshine, cool drinks and rabbiting on about Legends with a score of Dutch Legends players and the GM of *Pegasus Games*, Dion. Everyone was wonderfully friendly, even thoughtfully holding the meet in an "English" theme pub, complete with cockles and mussels on the menu...

Jimmy van der Meij kindly put me up during my stay, where I discovered that his fiancee and I share an interest in recorder consort music. Funny old world.'

Clint Oldridge describes **USGencon**, which he attended for *Middle Earth Games*:

'US Gencon was cool: we met up with around 15 of our Middle Earth players over the four days we were there, got a decent amount of players to sign up (and now playing Battle of Five Armies, our introductory scenario to Play By Email), ran into Rick Loomis of *Flying Buffalo* fame (traded PBM stories for a couple of hours and chatted about the future of PBM). Added to this we chatted to Pete Stassun (owner of GSI) and basically had a fun time.

Lots of time was spent hobnobbing with the elite of gaming (we shared a room with the guys who personally know Gary Gygax) and networking - lots will come of this in future months. Small world that it is we ran into a boardgame company called **Jeseret Games** who are based in Cardiff (about one mile from the office)...'

We've been contacted by the Booking Manager of **Bylaugh Hall**, Bylaugh, near Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4RL. He suggests that the Hall would be an ideal venue for a weekend games convention, with a large event space in The Orangery which could hold day visitors as well as the 60 people who can stay at the Hall. There's a catering kitchen attached to The Orangery as well as provision for a cash bar. If interested, obtain more details from:

www.bylaugh.com
john@bylaugh.com

Our regular columnist **Eric Ridley** attended the **Claymore** wargames convention at Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh, in his guise as a *Man in Black* representing *Steve Jackson Games*.

'It was mainly a trade show, but also

Newsdesk Boardgames

featured quite a lot of demos and exhibition games. The traders had a lot of nice miniatures and scenery for sale and seemed to do well - the quality of the display areas was notable too. In all around 400 people came through the doors between 10am and 4pm, the atmosphere was friendly and there was always something to look at, even if the event did seem to lack a little bit of soul.'

[We welcome reports on any convention or pubmeet that readers have attended...]

Board and Card Games

Rio Grande confirm that they're in the process of reprinting out-of-stock games, including some that you'll know from our pages like **Pueblo**, **Carcassonne: Traders & Builders** and **Puerto Rico**. **Amun-Re**, which Pevans reviewed for us last issue, will be back in stock at the end of this month.

They will release several new games this month. Among them is one for two players, **Lord of the Rings: the Duel**, based (as you might guess) on the duel between Gandalf and the Balrog in the Mines of Moria. The cards have symbols denoting your magical offensive and defensive powers, to be used against each other on the bridge across the chasm. The game costs $19.95, as does another two-player game that's coming up, the stand-alone expansion of **Carcassonne** called **Carcassonne: the Castle**.

For several players who want a light-hearted game, there's **Gulo Gulo** ($34.95) where players have to find and rescue Gulo junior. He's been imprisoned by a vulture who's caught him stealing her egg, but you're a bit hampered in your rescue mission by a compulsion to steal eggs yourself. Other multi-player games coming up are Reiner Knizia's flea-circus cardgame **Circus Flohcati** at $9.95, **Ricochet Robots** where you move robots without either brakes or steering wheels towards targets in their warehouse at $24.95, **Coloretto** at $9.95 and **Magna Grecia** at $34.95.

www.riograndegames.com

We're delighted to hand over to Pevans for more news ....

The winner of the prestigious Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) prize in Germany is **Alhambra**, designed by Dirk Henn and published by *Queen Games*. The two runners up were **Die Dracheninsel** (**Dragon Island**), designed by Tom Schoeps and published by *Amigo*, and **Clans**, designed by Leo Colovini and published by *Winning Moves* (in Germany).

The winners of the International Gamers' Awards were announced in June. The Historical Simulations category was won by **Hammer of the Scot**s (Jerry Taylor and Tom Dalgleish, *Columbia Games*). The Multi-player General Strategy prize went to **Puerto Rico** (Andreas Seyfarth, *alea*). Our congratulations to all the winners.

Budget game specialist *Cheapass Games* has several new titles on the way. **One False Step for Mankind** has the players competing to build a moon rocket. In California during the 1849 gold rush! The odds are against anybody succeeding in getting to the moon, but the furthest along the path will win - you just have to be prepared for casualties along the way. Effectively, this is a game of resource management. Cheapass's Hip Pocket games are what they suggest: a small package that can be slipped into a pocket. The next game is **Timeline**, an abstract time-travel game in which players attempt to control the future in order to make their investments pay off.

One of my favourite games of 2002 was the 'Spaghetti Western' card game, **Bang!**, published in Italy by *da Vinci Games*. The company has now produced a second edition of the game, with a few tweaks to the rules and some different cards. The rules for the second edition can be downloaded from their website (*www.davincigames.com*) - in Dutch, English, German or Italian. Meanwhile *Mayfair Games* (*www.mayfairgames.com*) is publishing a US edition of Bang!, which may be more likely to make it into UK shops. Mayfair is also producing a travel edition of **Settlers of Catan**. The hexagonal tiles slot into positions in a board to hold them in place. The roads, settlements and towns have pegs on their bases that fit the holes between the tiles. Otherwise, everything is the same, only smaller. This should make it possible to play the game on, say, a train, but I can't quite see the game making it to the back seat of the car.

French publisher *Descartes* have come up with an introductory version of motor racing game Formula Dé. **Formula Dé Mini** was designed by Eric Randall and Laurent Lavaur and is a cut-down version of its big brother. Inside the A5-ish box, you have a

couple of small racing tracks on mounted boards - unlike Formula Dé, these are abstract tracks, rather than a representation of real Grand Prix circuits. Only five gears are available - the circuits are too small for sixth gear to be a realistic possibility - and much of the detail of the main game has been left out. The game takes about 30 minutes to play and should be readily available in UK games shops at around £25.

Talking of car racing games, who remembers **Carabande**? Published by *Goldsieber* in 1996, the game is about flicking wooden pucks (Carrom-style) along a melamine-coated track and was a great hit as a fun game. It was discontinued by Goldsieber a few years later (but not before they'd produced an expansion set featuring a chicane and a jump). Frenchman Cédric Huet is now publishing the game, as **PitchCar**, through his games company, *Ferti*. The new game is much the same as Goldsieber's original edition, but with the 'cars' marked in two colours so that players can identify teams or play individually. I don't know whether this will be available in the UK shops, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

Talking of re-prints, I was pleased to see **Intrige** (Intrigue) billed as a new game from *Amigo*. The game, designed by Stefan Dorra, was published by FX Schmid (later taken over by Ravensburger) in 1994. Intrige is a game of fiendish negotiation and back-stabbing as players allocate 'jobs' in the courts to other players' protegés. There are no holds barred as players aim to amass the most money by any means. However, the new game is a card game, developed by card-game specialist Reinhard Staupe. It appears to retain all the main points of the original, so this should be a firm favourite with games-playing groups (just don't play it with your family!).

If you've seen an *Eagle Games* game, you'll know that they come in big boxes with lost of pieces, Axis & Allies style. The US company is following up its board game adaptation of computer game Sid Meier's Civilization with **Age of Mythology: the Boardgame**. Players control armies made up of warriors, priests, heroes and mythical creatures from ancient Greek, Egyptian and Norse mythology. They gather resources, which allow them to create buildings and armies. Battles are resolved with a combination of dice and cards.

Also coming from *Eagle* is **Attack!**, a new game system. The idea is to create a system that will allow players of any skill level to buy the perfect game for them. Attack! is a simple game of expansion and

conflict set in the World War 2 era. The game is not intended to be a simulation of the era, but to convey the flavour of warfare in the period. Each player starts with a few regions and a few military units and aims to expand their 'sphere of influence'. This may be done through diplomacy or military conquest. The board shows North and South America, Europe and Africa set around the Atlantic Ocean. The expansion set adds Asia, Australia and the Pacific. **Attack! Expansion** also adds to the complexity of the game with extra rules - and provides pieces for extra players. Expect these to cost £25-30 in the shops.

Phalanx Games have several new titles on the way to add to their line of high quality board wargames. **The Prince** (or possibly **Borgia** - I've seen both titles used) is a card game in which players connive and scheme to become Pope. Given that this is based on the Borgias, I expect this to be a tasteful game of assassination, incest, back-stabbing, military conflict and sponsorship of artistic geniuses. OK, maybe not, but it's a fascinating period and should make a good game. More in line with Phalanx's other titles is **Age of Napoleon 1805-1815**. This is a two-player introductory wargame of the Napoleonic period: one player is France, the other gets to play just about everybody else (Austria, England, Russia et al). Designed by Renaud Verlaque, the game's rules contain a number of scenarios and card play is a feature of the game system.

Winsome Games's latest is **InterUrban** by Michael Schacht. Given that Schacht is best known for clever, abstract games, this should be very interesting. The basis is a tile-laying railway game, but set in the suburbs of American cities in the 1920s and 1930s. As the suburbs grew rapidly around the densely populated urban areas, high speed InterUrban trains served the commuters. Different lines compete to achieve the most revenue from the suburbs. Players try to get their stations into the most advantageous positions as they, collectively, build the network.

Late News

Good news from Mike Absolom of Tempus Fugit PBM Productions and his wife: their daughter, Jessica Mabel, was born on 15th August 2003. Both mother and baby are doing well. Mike warns that turnaround for hishand-moderated game, Saturnalia - The South, may be delayed but adds that he expects that the computer-moderated playtests for LTWars will continue to schedule. *http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk*

Roleplaying Games

Plenty of RPG material is coming out ready for the autumn now. Almost a comfort for the prospect of the long, dark evenings ahead. Let's start with an upgrade of a fairly well-known system:

HeroQuest RPG (Gloranthan Core Rulebook)
This is a revised and expanded version of **Hero Wars**. You get the Hero Wars material and a new version of the Narrator's Book (ISS 1104), together with the complete rules for HeroQuest itself. There's help with character creation, new rules for the hero bands, simplified contest resolution and the magic systems have been streamlined. With new adventures and scenarios, this seems an essential upgrade.
From: Issaries
Price: £24.99

En Route II: By Land or by Sea (d20 Sourcebook)
Like the original En Route, this is a collection of short encounters which can be added where appropriate to longer adventures. It includes episodes suitable for sea voyages as well as travelling by land, each of which takes an hour or so to play.
So what do you get? 'Escaped slaves, imprisoned mermaids, swarming elementals, blink bunnies, insane inventors, peeved trolls, possessed livestock, and a bevy of other hazards to block your way...' Handy for every RPG moderator!
From: Atlas Games
Price: £12.99

Ships & Sea Battles (d20 Swashbuckling Adventures/7th Sea Sourcebook)
Well, the title makes it pretty plain what this is about. Yes, it includes rules for both the 7th Sea RPG system and d20 Swashbuckling Adventures. Vital for any seabound adventuring.
From: Alderac Entertainment Group
Price: £16.99

Dragonlance d20 Campaign Setting
This uses the d20 games system for the world of Dragonlance, which appears in the well-known series of novels. It includes character classes, skills, prestige classes, races, feats, magic items and monsters, along with timelines, maps, artifacts and information about major characters and deities.
From: Wizards of the Coast
Price: £26.99 (Hardback)

CthulhuTech
This is a core rulebook which blends Lovecraft's mythos of horror with the futuristic machinery of Japanese mecha anime. The background is Humankind's last war against the Mi-Go and the Great Old Ones, and there's startling weaponry involved in the struggle.
From: Eos Press
Price: $24.95

Moving onto a tantalising range of science fiction RPGs ...

Stargate SG-1 RPG
A game based on the TV show Stargate, in which you're a member of an SG team sent through the stargate and onto an alien planet with all its unfamiliar dangers. The rulebook includes details of the programme's alien races and cultures, along with all the necessary information about character creation, skills, equipment etc. The game's designed to be suitable for beginners as well as experienced RPG players, and there's lots of detail about the TV series which should appeal to its fans.
From: Alderac Entertainment Group
Price: £29.99

Earth Alliance Fact Book
Game Line: Babylon 5
Also based on a TV series, Babylon 5, this d20 sourcebook gives details of the history underlying the Earth Alliance and includes new prestige classes, feats and items of equipment, as well as information about the Alliance's military forces and new spacecraft designs.
From: Mongoose Publishing

Star Wars Galactic Campaign Guide (Star Wars d20 RPG)
And from s/f on TV to the grandeur of the Star Wars movies. This sourcebook expands the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game Revised Core Rulebook** with a tremendous amount of additional detail. There are maps (48 of them) for encounter locations, 100 adventure ideas, various mini-campaign ideas, random name generators for the various heroic species and outlines for various supporting characters.
From: Wizards of the Coast
Price: £19.99

Newsdesk Misc

CORE Command: Big Nasty Aliens (Silhouette/d20 Sourcebook)
This is a supplement to the Silhouette CORE rulebook(tm) published by Dream Pod 9, Inc, or a Roleplaying Game Core Book published by Wizards of the Coast(R), Inc. It offers more aliens, more equipment and more scary creatures and plants, along with other handy extras. It's dual-statted, so can be used with either of the Core rulebooks.
From: Dream Pod 9
Price: £11.99

GURPS Uplift 2nd Edition (GURPS Sourcebook)
This sourcebook is derived from David Brin's *Uplift* series, where humanity realises that the surrounding galaxy is peopled by advanced but unfriendly civilisations. The choices are slavery, destruction or a constant struggle for survival. The sourcebook includes information about the significant alien species and the terragens planets, as well as rules for creating new species.
From: Steve Jackson Games
Price: £18.99

GURPS Traveller: Starships
GURPS Traveller
A book that aims to include the whole range of possible starfaring craft, from the biggest to the smallest. They all have their own writeups and deck plans, while there's a lot of information about ship design in general, collecting all the design rules that have been previously published in the GURPS: Traveller series. Passengers and crew aren't forgotten, either, and there are various encounters that could be used by a moderator.
From: Steve Jackson Games
Price: $24.95

Flying Buffalo Inc don't simply handle PBM games, and we've heard that they're planning to reprint the materials for their **Tunnels and Trolls**, which is mostly out of stock at present. The old rulebook sold for $9.95 and the new one will be $19.95, because there will be additional pages included and the **Buffalo Castle** solitaire adventure as well. However, Flying Buffalo are making a special offer whereby you can put in an advance order for the new rulebook at the old price, as long as you pay for it now and are prepared to wait for the two or three months before it's ready.
www.flyingbuffalo.com
Flying Buffalo also have a bunch of **Villains and Vigilantes** stuff for sale. There's a list at:
*www.flyingbuffalo.com/vnv.htm*

Other Magazines

Issue 27 of the quarterly RPG magazine **Valkyrie** has landed with a satisfying thwack on our doormat, and it's full of news and reviews for roleplaying gamers. Good stuff fills its pages, but in line with our own discussion of kids in gaming let's especially mention Bill Walton's column listing some RPGs suitable for introducing children to the absorbing hobby.
We run an ad swap with Valkyrie, so you'll find subscription details in their ad this issue. Their website is:
www.caliverbooks.com

PBEM Roleplaying
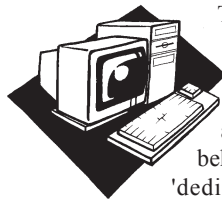
The **Phoenyx** is an internet service which has been brought to our attention. The people behind this website are 'dedicated to building a roleplaying community online.'
The site offers free email discussion groups (with web and newsgroup interfaces), IRC channels and MU* servers (MUDS, MUSHES etc) for anyone wishing to run online roleplaying games. The *Phoenyx Fantasy World* is 'a shared setting for play-by-email and other net-based roleplaying games. The setting is a work in progress; if you don't mind seeing the spoilers, you can help out'. Check the Project Overview for details:
www.phoenyx.net

Those of you interested in this genre of gaming (mostly carried out via internet mailing lists with in-character postings from the players) may find the *Irony Games* website useful:
www.pbem.com
The site is regularly maintained and contains an exhaustive listing of games looking for new players. A wide range of genres is catered for, including **D&D**, **Star Trek**, Modern, Fantasy and Sports. At the time of writing, a grand total of 351 games were listed as seeking players. The vast majority of these games are non-commercial and should be approached as such.
There are some useful gaming links, and Irony Games even have a discount bookstore!

Win books by Thomas Harlan, *signed by the author,* in our competition!

The latest book by Thomas "*Lords of the Earth*" Harlan '**Wasteland of Flint**' is reviewed on page 17 by Martin Helsdon. Would you like to win a free signed hardback copy of this book? Then enter our competition below! But there's more! The runner-up will receive a signed paerback set of Thomas's *'Oath of Empire'* series of books. Don't panic: the answers are all in this issue's pages. Send your answers to us by email or on the enclosed response card.
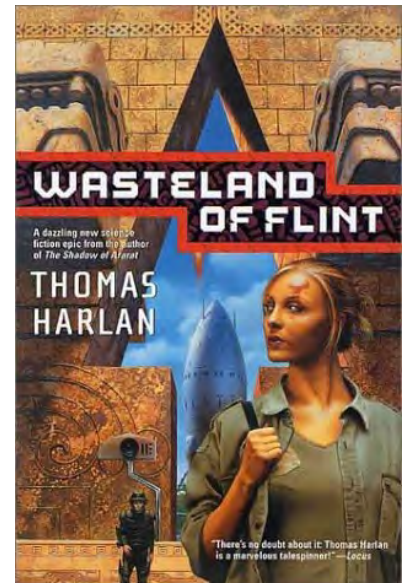
1 In which game does Edinburgh join the Hanseatic League?
2 In which game do players struggle for "hairy-backed survival"?
3 Who would be 'too amazed to stop playing a game that resembled real life'?
4 Which game had Doughnut the Rotund as a close runner up?
5 Which game nation is ruled by Igor the Fat?
6 Who thanks 'everyone who wrote to me, even for the new words I can now add to my vocabulary'?
7 Which of our writers mentions the 'modding' scene?
8 Which of our writers considers 'the future of time wasters'?
9 Which of our writers decides against describing 'clockwork flying monkeys'?
10 Which game needs but lacks 'a map of the entire game world'?

In the event of a tie break, all correct answers will be put into a hat and the winners drawn at random.

Supernova III
Rise of the Empire

MARK HYGATE, aka Ur-Lord Tedric, on the relaunch of this complex game ...

THE NEW VERSION of **Supernova** (SN III) started up last September and a small note to that effect was published in *Flagship*. I contacted *Rolling Thunder Games* (RTG) and started as soon as possible. Even then, I was only able to start on game turn 3 and the game already had a thriving presence on the boards. The few UK players in at the start, it seems, were also players of Victory, another long-standing RTG game.

I was very keen to join: had been for a long time! SN II ran here in the UK and then moved to Holland in the late eighties and early nineties, finally suffering a pretty bad fold. There were countless devotees here in UK with a lot of passion (I met some of them!). Sadly the franchise was for UK and Europe, and the US had their own games running. It was big, it was bad and it was beautiful. When the game folded, SN III (already SN:ROTE) was on the cards. This was to be a global game based much more on e-mail. I badgered RTG regularly over the next year or so, but nothing ever matured. Then there was that little note in the news columns and now most of a year has passed and, at the time of submitting this review (2nd August), I will have just received my 19th turn. Turns are bi-weekly and regularly appear in your inbox to greet you on a Saturday morning.

Just to finish off this opening missive, I want to comment that this may not be the game for everybody. Patience may be a virtue, but in this game it's essential. After 18 turns I haven't met anybody yet! A few of the Turn Zero players (so that's three turns ahead of me) are starting to report the odd meeting. Being fair, there may be a lot more that aren't being reported, but I'm exploring hard and it hasn't happened yet. So, if you are after instant player interaction and early grand space battles, then this one isn't for you and I shall forgive any who stop reading right now and turn the page, let alone that this resulting review is, by necessity, mainly fact based.

Scene setting

SN:ROTE is, as mentioned, *big*. That's big in size, big in depth and definitely big in complexity. I may be very comfortable using computers to support my gaming, but, in my opinion, this game needs spreadsheet assistance. That said, there are a number of players who are ready to help and have developed some simple tools that will certainly get you started. They'll also help you not make some early mistakes.

The rules, turn-input program, some supplements and a few player aids are all available from the RTG website. RTG also sponsor a web-forum. (Details in the *At a Glance* box.) I recommend the input program for your orders. It works well and will help prevent a lot of silly mistakes if it's followed. The rules certainly give you a flavour and the Orders Supplement is a must; as is the player-generated Economics Treatise. However, the rules don't tell all and there's much to discover. There's

been a lot of discussion on the boards about what else should be in the rules and this has resulted in some additional supplements.

The start-up sheet is mostly taken up by race design, for which there is a whole chapter in the rules. This stage is very important, as it will define how you might approach the game and the path you choose to take. You get 2000 points to spend and you may consider saving some as they can assist your early research efforts (see later).

On your 'zeroth' turn you get a standardised set-up turn response (again, see later) and thereafter, in response to your turns (submitted on a Wednesday, every two weeks), a *pdf* file emailed back in time for Saturday morning. You also need to decide how to pay for your turns. I use a Visa card, which makes it very simple. Other options include Mastercard and Pay Pal (plus US players can always send cash!). The cost is something you must bear in mind. It's $6 for a 30-order 'sheet' (I believe it's $8 if playing by regular post, but that's at US rates - I'm not sure it's a viable option overseas). RTG are confident you can play an empire at about $24-30 per month (that's two turns). I've been trying to do this and I will support that view. Many players are just submitting 30 orders per turn. My first turn was 150 orders, but more about that later as well. If you don't submit a turn, then all is not lost. The turn will run anyway, with any 'standing orders' you have given carrying on normally. RTG are going to celebrate the first anniversary of the game by increasing the number of orders on the 'turnsheet' from 30 to 40, but keeping the cost the same at $6. This represents a reduction in the cost of 25%. Coming to a galaxy near you, about right now!

I'm planning to do this review in two parts. I know very little about the Combat side of the game, nor about the Diplomacy element. So Part 2 will probably be in another year. With luck that one will be more exciting!

So this first part will concentrate on: set-up, research, economics, exploration and characters.

Set-up

The standard set-up form is five pages long and is also available from the website. I suggest printing one out and scribbling all over it, and then typing the result clearly into an email to send direct. Processing the start-up and getting that 'zeroth' turn costs $10. The first page contains personal details and the following mandatory personalised bits for your empire: empire name; primary government type; government type modifier; imperial tradition; leader title; leader name; imperial emblem.

The names can be anything, but you are encouraged to remain in good taste. The government bits will affect your in-game diplomacy with the NPC empires/splinters you may encounter, as well as affecting the chances of getting certain character types. There's a lot to guide you in chapter 10 of the rules, but I've only just had any experience of this and will leave this element until Part 2 of the review. The names and titles will appear whenever your in-game persona is quoted. Thus was born the Star League; an Imperial Federation, with a Martial Arts tradition, lead by Ur-Lord Tedric, with the emblem of a Diamond of Nine Stars On A Field Of Sable.

That was the easy bit! On the other four pages you have a choice to make in 19 categories. I'll just list them to give you the flavour: Chapter 11 is all about lifeform design and covers it in good detail. The categories are: Basic Lifeform; Primary Configuration; Configuration Options; Tail Type; Intelligence; Mental Powers; Sensory Ability; General Constitution; Ingestion Mode; Reproductive Rate; Special Features (up to 10); Natural

Body Armour; Type A Combat Features (up to 10); Type B Combat Features (up to 5); Type C Combat Feature; Physical Size; Strength; Speed & Aglity; and a Physical Description.

Now, many of these are optional, but all the basic ones are mandatory, where you have to make choices. The real issue here is that it is in making these choices you define the essential characteristics of your species and what it will be good at, and not so good at. This is where you can spend your 2000 points. Some of the choices give you negatives, which can increase your store of points, and some are very expensive, meaning you will have to take negatives somewhere to achieve them and remain viable. In short you can probably design any form of carbon-based lifeform you fancy, from any science fiction genre and then some. There are humans, elves, dwarves, dragons, cats, insects and even plants (Triffids anyone?). I ended up spending all my points as I decided this would equip me well for the long-term. In hindsight, I'd have kept a few - see Research & Exploration!

When you get back that startup turn, almost the first thing you'll see is the result of your choices as a bar chart comparing the various strengths, or weaknesses, of the choices you've made. These are in the areas of: Space Combat Modifier; Research Modifier; Ground Combat Modifier; Exploration Modifier; Special Modifier; Diplomacy; Defence; Colonisation; and Close Combat Modifier. There is no scale to the chart: they are all relative. As I spent all 2000 points to achieve enhancement, I received all positive results. I have, however, seen others with significant negatives.

{See Picture}

The rest of the report then goes through what you start with. You'll have a planet in a system, somewhere in the game universe. You have details of the resources available on that planet, a scan of the star system you are in, details of your population group(s), your two starting ship designs (one of which is a ground defence base) and then a list of all your current starting technology. And there's more, all to give you information that you can spend hours poring over. It should be pointed out that the first players (up to about turn 10, I believe) started with five different population groups. However, after player comment and the fact that most players spent the first couple of turns re-grouping everything into just one of the groups, the current startups have everything in the one population group already. I settled on keeping three population groups, but it still took a first turn of 150 orders to set it all up as I wanted. And I still changed my mind later!

Research

The research system has been given a complete makeover, although old exponents will recognise a lot of the terminology. On your 'zeroth' turn you get a list of all the technology you can currently research (let alone the long list you will already have seen of what you've currently got). This is just the start of your introduction to the Technology Tree. I can assure you that it appears to widen and not shrink! Players have already set up loose 'alliances' just to discuss the Technology Tree.

The big difference is that you have just 25 Research Centres (RCs) to put to researching these items. It is also firmly pointed out that multiple research centres will act less efficiently. With the second level technology taking between 10-12 turns to research with 1RC (that's nearly six months), the obvious statement is that rising in technology takes time and investment. I should also point out that players have yet to confirm

the exact efficiency ratings for multiple RCs - although we're working on it! It's for here that many people have decided to save their set-up points, for you can buy lower-level technology with your saved points. If you have saved points, then by setting your first RC on to a technology (commonly called Slot 1'ing it), you can buy this technology in one turn. It does appear that, if you went with the 'standard' human, with no enhancements, set-up and had all 2000 points saved, then this will last for at least your first 20 turns (but that's from hearsay and it could last much longer). If my current plans come to fruition, then I should have acquired about 50 advances by Turn 20. A player who had saved all his points could therefore have about 70. By the time you are looking at third generation technology, I suspect that this would mean such a player is one complete step ahead of you. However, and depending on the choices you made with your race, after this you should be able to start closing the gap. The game does appear to be well balanced, but only time will tell.

Now this happens to suit me down to the ground. For a long time I have wished for a technology tree that is actually meaningful in my games, I'm also somewhat anti-magic in other genres for the over powerful effect that is often seen. In this game, the designers have opted for a longer-term approach and, because technology refresh will be less often, players' skill levels will increase and become a greater element in the game. In addition, they hope to encourage trade opportunities between players, because, whilst the technology itself cannot be transferred, the items can. As few players have met, this has not happened yet (as far as I know). It does raise the possibilities inherent in economic warfare, trade interdiction and even piracy! The idea does seem to be that players will specialise in only a few areas of the tree and trade for the rest.

The technologies fall into four distinct categories: Ship Components; Resources; Horizon Technology; Ground Combat advances. The first is self-explanatory. Resources are those things you need to process and assemble into components (see Economics). At present I am aware of the base Resources and both Improved and Advanced versions. Depending on the technology level of the component you want to make, you will need one of these levels. Thus it is not possible to advance down just one avenue on the technology tree, as you will need various others to gain them - plenty of cross-connecting branches. The Horizon technologies are another example of these. These are technologies that underpin your advances. Lastly, the Ground technologies increase the effectiveness of your Army Divisions.

Economics

This area will be the new player's first experience of the complexity involved. It may put people off and it's certainly the area where I spent some considerable time designing a spreadsheet to cope with it. However, that spreadsheet is now available from the RTG site and other players have produced similar examples, so you can take your pick. In short, you should remember this: various types of Mine produce Resources based upon the Resource Potentials available on your Homeworld(HW), or later your Colonies; for those resources that you don't have the resource potential for, you have Stripmines that produce Raw Resources, which can be converted by Industrial Complexes (ICs) to the basic resources at a rate of 10:1; these basic resources are then converted to more complex resources by more ICs, normally at a rate of 3:1; finally these complex
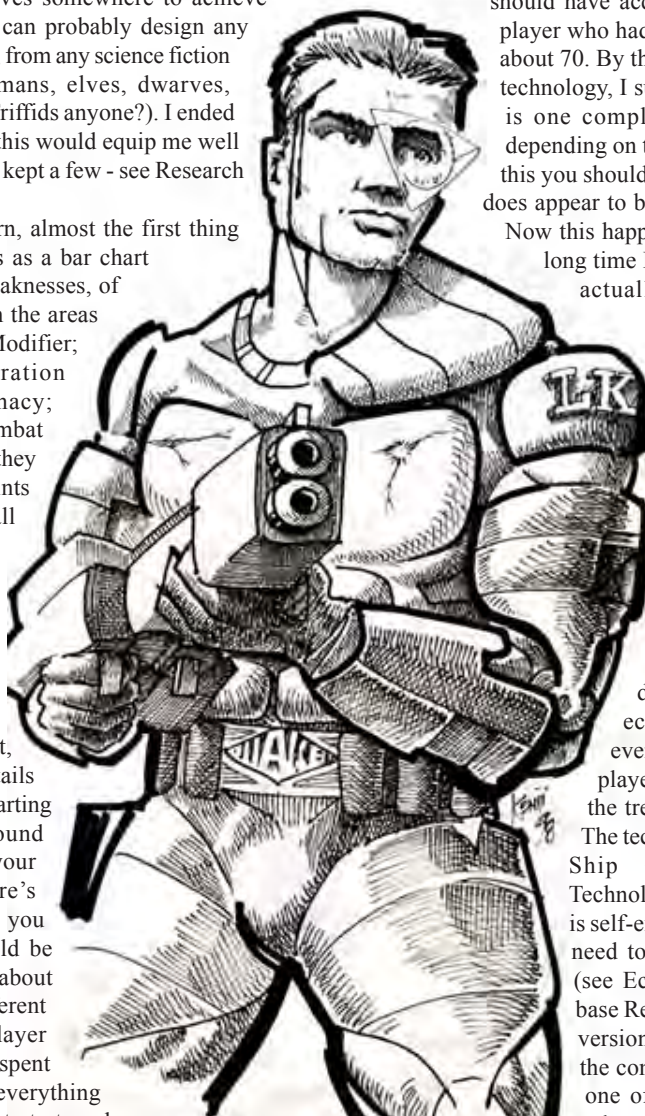
resources are combined by yet more ICs into Components, Construction Materials (CMs), or Army Troops. Just to further complicate matters there is sometimes an additional stage where a third level of resource production is necessary.

Now, I know that sounds bad, but once grasped, it's something that can be put behind you. As a simple example of a common requirement:

    3 Iron are refined into 1 Steel

    1 Steel & 2 Timber makes 1 CM

    3 Lumber are refined into 1 Timber

Steel is also used directly in producing other items, particularly Colonial Berthings (50,000 required). In the first few turns, unless you have no intention to colonise, I suspect that most of your production effort will be used to produce Steel! I've had an average of 60% of my productive effort devoted to Steel production for the entire game, so far.

In case people are being put off, it's worth mentioning here, although it applies to several other areas of the game, that the likely delay before meeting people does give you sufficient time to make mistakes, build up your initial plans and do some exploring without interference. This is in stark contrast to SN II, where it wasn't unknown for new players to be found by a more advanced player and disappear under a massive Drone Strike within only a few turns of starting. Whilst I'll cover Combat in the next article, I'm fairly sure this won't happen this time. In fact, taking someone's HW is likely to be a major undertaking and probably not possible without allies.

Just to round up this brief introduction to the wonderful world of SN:ROTE's economics, I must comment on order usage and cost. Some players plan what they want for the turn and what ship(s) they want to build next turn (you have to have the components ready the turn before the ship is constructed), every turn. They then write sufficient orders (1 resource/component per order) to produce what they need. Now, for a complex warship, that will be the better part of two turnsheets ($12) just to do this. However, if you plan what you will probably want so that at least the complex resources are ready (and you cannot go wrong in producing lots of Steel!), then you can write the order once and set the ICs to 'Tool' the item. Then it will happen every turn until you delete, or modify, the order and those orders do not cost you any more either. If you can make some sensible plans and use the spreadsheet, then you won't do this very often and it will help keep the number of orders down. I shall also comment here that there are a number of Standing Orders you can use and, even more useful, a Convoy route system that is very flexible. Whilst it costs to write these once, they then stay available all the time.

Exploration

Exploration, per se, of individual planets and moons is very much like other games of this ilk. Using the Explore order, or its standing order equivalent (EXPL or XEXPL), will gain you glimpses of future technology, which may enhance research efforts when it's time to research these items, and some of the underlying background to the game (like the common message on your HW that informs you that you were once part of the mighty T'ckon Star League). It's also rumoured that you can occasionally find items, but I am not aware of anyone who has done so yet. The chances of getting these finds reduce as you have more and more orders devoted to exploration. This was done to limit the advantage some players seemed to be accruing by having a vast number of standing orders and lots of small fleets.

However, under this heading I want to particularly focus on exploring the game universe and the mapping system. Unlike SN II, which had 3-D mapping by 'sectors/cubes', some of which contained star systems, SN:ROTE has something completely different. I suspect the most common analogy in game terms is the ever popular Starweb. Star Systems are connected by one, or many, Warp Points (WPs), which go to other Star Systems. A number of systems are termed a Warp Nexus and they contain no star, or planets. They merely exist as nodes for WPs.

You can determine where these WPs go by surveying them with the survey order (SURV). In order to do this you need the appropriate level of Jump Survey Sensor (JSS). This is the one area where I wished I had saved a few set-up points. Your initial Pathfinder Fleet Scout comes equipped with the Mark I version of the JSS. It will happily survey the first two classes of WP, but will only do the third class by combining great numbers of them. There are currently seven classes of WP known, ranging from A to G. Each is progressively harder to SURV and consumes more and more fuel to get through (linked to the law of squares). Your Pathfinder will be able to SURV the exit and egress WPs to your HW with relative ease, due to 'great familiarity and long study'. Thereafter you're on your own and it is here that I wish I'd been able to purchase the Mk II JSS! That said, certain of the Characters can assist in surveying and, provided there's a handy planet (not in Warp Nexii) then by creating a new population group and building one, or more, science installations, you can also survey more than your technology would otherwise allow. It's worth picking up on this point on Fuel. Once built, ships and installations have no maintenance requirement. However, ships need fuel to transit WPs. Early on you will probably have only a few ships; if you have potential colonies within your HW system, then you may not actually need to leave. However, when out exploring the galaxy and when those massive fleets of starships are off and away, then Fuel will become of major import. Eventually you will need a complete network of Refuelling Stations and Tankers to support your Navy.

And this is where the strategy will come in. The creation in this version of the game of a nodal network of interconnections recreates the concept of 'terrain' and 'strategic points' in a space game. Continual exploration and mapping will be a fundamental part of the game as you try to find out where you are in the universe. Because of the nodal structure, it doesn't actually matter where you are in 3-D space, it's the routes that connect you to other players that are important!

Characters

A short note on Characters. There are a number of player characters in the game. You start with three or four and then others are recruited automatically throughout the game. They can also apparently die. It is assumed that your Imperial Tradition affects the more common characters you can recruit, but I am not assured of this. With my tradition of Martial Arts I have only received one other like character in 18 turns since the one I received with my start-up and I'm now up to 27 characters. The character types seen so far are: Administrators; Army Officers; Diplomats; Explorers; Martial Artists; Merchants; Naval Officers; Religious Leaders; Scientists; Special Agents; and Traders. They also have ranks and receive promotions as they become more experienced. Your Imperial Leader is always a high-level Diplomat.

The most obvious benefits seen from the characters so far are in exploration and production bonuses. Explorers and Scientists can make higher class WPs easier to survey. Administrators, Diplomats, Religious Leaders and Traders can increase the output from your Mines, but may have other uses. Diplomats and perhaps others can assist in negotiation with NPCs - more next time. Combat bonuses from the Officers, we'll have to wait and see.
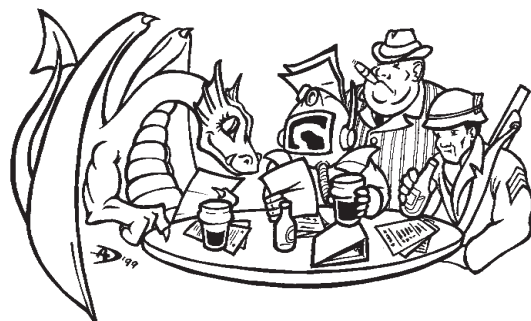
Summary

If you are an old Supernova player I think you'll like it and enjoy the differences. I would personally like to see more players from the UK as I think there are fewer than ten at present. Whilst a hard number is difficult to get out of the GMs, it does seem that there are over 300 players out there somewhere. So, come play with the Americans.

If you like big, sprawling, complex space-operas, then this is worth a real long look. However, don't expect instant action. You are placed far enough apart so that you can settle in, get the basics under your belt and have a good chance of surviving any initial attacks. As players meet, alliances will form: there are indeed some already talked about, but it will be your player interactions that define the game.

It does cost money, but that can be kept down. It is certainly possible to have a really good game for only a reasonable outlay. You can, of course go mad if you have lots of money and a great deal of spare time, and have more than one empire. One's enough for me! What I will say, with complete sincerity, every second Saturday cannot come round quick enough - and I still haven't met anybody!

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Bean Trader

PEVANS reaps the rewards of this boardgame ...

I MENTIONED a while back that I played the prototype of this game at last year's Spiel and enjoyed it. I've now had the opportunity to play the final (not to mention English) version of the game and I'm still impressed. The German edition, published by Amigo, is called **Bohn Hansa**, which extends the pun of **Bohnanza** - Uwe Rosenberg's much-extended card game. There is actually very little in common between the two games, except for the different types of bean involved.

Bean Trader is a boardgame, designed by Rosenberg, about delivering beans between the cities of the Hanseatic League (though I wasn't aware that Edinburgh was part of the League) to earn money. The player with the most cash at the end wins the game. The game comes with a mounted board, showing a stylised map of northern Europe. Specifically, it features ten cities, linked by roads. Each city produces two-three different colours of bean and has a track - the 'Beanometer' - that indicates the current prices of those beans. Prices go down as beans are harvested and added to the Beanometer. They rise as beans are bought from the Beanometer. Players have a wooden horse-and-cart piece to indicate where they are. They also have a card with a summary of the rules and spaces for the (up to eight) beans in their cart. There are banknotes for the money and solid cardboard counters for the eight types (and colours) of bean used in the game.

Each player has a hand of seven cards specific to the colour they've chosen. Cards are played from your hand - strictly in the order they are held in - for each city you move into or out of in your turn. Only two of the cards really matter. Playing the Toll card (number 3 in everybody's hand) means you have to pay 20 Thalers (the game's currency) to the bank. Playing the Supply card (a different number in each player's hand) means that a New Harvest card is drawn. According to the bean type and cities shown on the card, extra beans are placed on the board. When the eighth New Harvest card is drawn, the game finishes. Note that, as
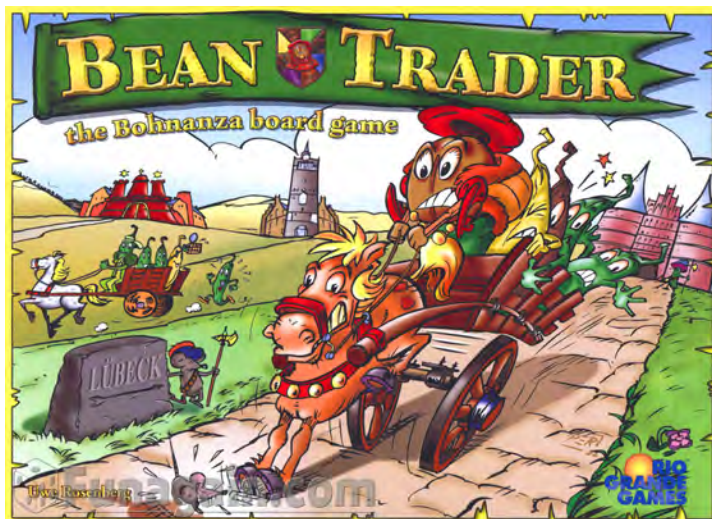
beans are added, they cover spaces on the Beanometer track in that city and reduce the cost of beans there. The other pack of cards in the game is made up of contracts. Each shows two-three different colours of bean, a city and a value. Delivering the right beans to the right city earns you that amount of money.

This is the core of the game: buying beans in one city, taking them somewhere else and selling them at a profit. Except that you'll have to visit at least two cities to get the right beans. Their cost will bring down your margin on the sale. And paying the Toll to transport them can make the whole deal unprofitable! So some planning is required. And there are further complexities to think about. To begin with, you start with three contracts, one of which is delivered to give you your starting capital (and decide who plays first). The other contracts go at the back of your hand. Which means that they can be played when you're moving, just like the travel cards. So, if you get it wrong, you can end up playing the contract you're trying to deliver before you get to your destination!

To explain all this, let's take a look at what you do in a turn. First off, you travel, moving your dobber down the roads you wish. You have to play one card from your hand for your starting city, finishing city and each one you pass through. And pay the Toll if you played it. Then the travel cards go back into your hand. They go at the back of your hand, Toll card first, then the Supply card (if you played either), then the rest. Which makes that pesky Toll come round far too quickly! Having arrived in your destination city, you can seek to trade beans with other players. If they're in a different city, they move (playing just one travel card) to the city you're in. Since this can move someone all the way across the board, it can be a huge benefit. Make sure you gain from the trading! You can also buy beans that are available in that city at the current price, if you have room in your cart. The price depends on the beanometer and will usually go up once you've bought. And you finish your turn by adding a new contract card to the back of your hand.

Before or after you move, you can deliver a contract. You discard the card and the correct beans from your board and receive the sum shown on the card. You can do this even with contracts that you've just played to move, which gives a bit of leeway. The other thing you can do - at any point - is trade in any of the standard travel cards and pay 5 Thaler to buy yourself an extra contract. Of course, getting rid of the card means that your Toll card will come round that bit faster from now on! Once the eighth New Harvest card has been turned over, you play

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Bean Trader at a glance

Boardgame in which the players take the roles of bean traders and are members of the famous Bohn Hansa, the union of northern European cities and merchants involved in the bean trade in the middle ages. The players travel from Hanse city to Hanse city in wagons filled with valuable beans to deliver bean orders and to buy more beans. When a player is in a city and has an order card and the necessary beans to fulfill the order, he may deliver the beans and collect the value of the order from the bank. When two or more players are together in a city, they may trade beans among themselves. Trading beans is important as it allows players to get rid of unwanted beans and acquire needed beans. In addition, a player will buy beans in the city, if they have the kind he wants. From time to time, the bean supplies will be replenished as described on new harvest cards. After eight new harvests, the game begins its last round. After this last round, the game ends and the player with the most bean thalers (money) is the winner.

Manufacturer: Rio Grande / Amigo
Designer: Uwe Rosenberg
Number of Players: 3 - 5   Time to Play: 1 - 1½ hours
Buy from your local game store or ....
www.leisuregames.com: £27.99   *www.funagain.com*: $25.95

one more round. At the end of the game, any beans in your wagon are cashed in at a standard value. The player with the most money wins.

For me, the game is reminiscent of an old FX Schmid title, Auf Achse. This has players trucking goods around a road map of Germany. The ability to trade between players makes Bean Trader a whole different bean game. It matters less what you have in your wagon than what you can trade and the whole game becomes highly interactive. I'm not sure whether this makes planning more important or less. If what I'm doing is looking for the optimum route to buy the beans I need and deliver my contract, I can plan it. If I can hop right across the board and swap the beans I have for a completely different set, then I've got a lot more things to think about. Who's going to want to join me in whichever city I'm in? Do they have beans I want? Do I have beans they want? With so many variables, I give up planning and play it by ear! Avoiding trading is not really an option. Getting around the board only by playing cards gets expensive (all those Tolls!) - and shortens the game as Supply cards come out. The need to buy the beans for the contract either means a lot more travel or doing deals. And deals usually work out cheaper. So - as in Bohnanza - the key to the game is trading.

All of which means that it's a cracking little game. I say 'little' because it feels like it finishes sooner than you're expecting. The given playing time is 90 minutes and that seems about right. Far from out-staying its welcome, though, the game leaves you wanting more. Which can't be bad!

Bean Trader is based on the card game Bohnanza
In Bohnanza, you have two or three bean fields and a handful of bean cards to plant in those fields. When you sell beans, you earn more for growing more of one variety than a few of several. Thus, you want to plant as many of your favorites as you can. But you must plant the beans in your hand in the order you got them. To get rid of the beans you don't want to plant, you trade them to other players for those you want. With clever trading, you get the cards you want without helping the other players too much. In the end, the player who earns the most gold is the winner!

The English language edition of the game is a combined set, equivalent to the original Bohnanza game plus the 6-7 player Bohnanza expansion. Bohnanza can be obtained from your local game shop or online from:
www.funagain.com at $10.95
www.leisuregames.co.uk at £12.99

Austerlitz: Russia

PHIL BATES, with a further tactical journal ...

TO DATE I have been on the winning side twice as Russia. Due to the speed of the troops and the fact that Russia only has one ore mine to begin the game, you must have patience when playing Russia.

Diplomacy

Russia is enormous compared to other countries and has the potential to be even larger in a year. This is a double-edged sword. Your army cannot be everywhere so you must make alliances. But these also telegraph to the world what your intentions are.

You should come to an arrangement with Sweden about their expansion into the neutral territory at the north of the map via the 59/2 link with 60/1. You should also come to an agreement about how far north Turkey will be allowed to expand. If Turkey goes further north than row 35, his intentions are hostile.

Economy

I have one piece of valuable advice. Please look to see what goods are already in your European warehouse and use them to make your economic builds more effective. Please do not follow the advice to the word outlined in the rules as this shows the other players in the game that you are 'The New Guy'.

There is no need to build estates before May. Your construction should be focused on Economic Point production in the first few months.

Moscow and St Petersburg start the game with a trade rate of 2. You must decide whether you want to empty the trade cities of important trade goods to help your army production.
Examples:
February: 2 Factories, 1 Mine, 1 Weaving Mill, 2 Sheep Farms, 4 Lumber Camps
March: 1 Weaving Mill, 8 Sheep Farms, 1 Quarry

Cavalry is expensive to build and train. Do not waste time building lots of horse breeding farms until you go to war to replace your losses. Cossacks are very useful for capturing neutral co-ordinates. Once you have a large army then you can build a cavalry corps to give your army more options in simulated battles. Do not build Vineyards until September to save maintenance costs. If you have destroyed your navy you will find wine is a good trading commodity when dealing with Turkey or Sweden.

Brigades

I, personally, like to build battalions in groups of 4. For example 28 battalions of Riflemen and 28 battalions of Grenadiers. This will maximise the effectiveness of your troops in large simulated battles. If you had five battalions of Musketeers and three battalions of Grenadiers your Sim report will show you having two federations of Musketeers available for deployment. The rules will always favour the weaker troop type. Your Grenadiers do not lose their higher training. But they will adopt all the formations available to Musketeers in the coming battle.

In the first turn I will build quality troops where possible in multiples of four. Please do not build quality every turn as you will run out of EcPts and money very quickly. I try to build Farmer Militia for garrison

troops and for use as flying columns to capture ground and to give the enemy something to chase while my main army is hunting out his main army.

Try to build 8 brigades of Riflemen in turn 3 or 4, followed by 8 brigades of Grenadiers in turn 5 or 6, with Farmer Militia in between. Do not bother training brigades of Farmer Militia unless you are flush with money and EcPts. Farmer Militia battalions are expendable.

Ships

You have no colonial position, which means you will be using your fleet for trade or moving troops. Your Baltic Fleet is large enough to worry your immediate neighbours. You cannot say the same thing for the Turkish navy. A word of warning, The Large Corsair (Type 9) has the same amount of Marines on board as a Type 15 Frigate. This means that your more expensive navy could be lost to a cheaper Turkish navy consisting of Large Corsairs and Type19-21 warships.

If you decide to join your navies together for local defence it will take around four turns to do so.

Your fleets cost you 907500L in maintenance each month. In comparison, a brigade of five Grenadier battalions will cost 600000L to build. If you want to focus on land-based invasions, scuttling your ships or selling your fleet to GB for example gives you an enormous advantage over your immediate neighbours.

Colonies

You have no need to start up a colonial position. It will be a drain on your resources to maintain it and a challenge to keep it. If you have the guts to build the Suez Canal you can expect GB to be in contact with you about your intentions almost immediately.

Strategies

In the games I played Russia, I invaded Warsaw as soon as possible. In Au 69 I did this by myself. In Au 180 I invaded Warsaw with Prussia, dividing it up by the political map. This gives you your third ore mine. It will take a very competent Warsaw player to defend against an attack from two directions.

It is important to get your diplomacy right early in the game because if you add up all the population on neutral co-ordinates, this will give you an extra 1 million Louisdore as income each month.

On capturing neutral co-ordinates, please do not use your start up brigades (or your best officers). It is well worth waiting a month and sending Farmer Militia or Cossacks to do this task. Your line troops will have more important things to do later in the game.

It is vital to your survival that you capture the ore mine in 79/2. If you want to do this really quickly, send an officer and a brigade of Cossacks unfederated to the co-ordinate. This way they are not restricted to moving three co-ordinates at a time.

You may also want to build a barracks at 73/30 to defend and capture the territory next to Turkey.

Due to the speed of your line troops, you will eventually have a network of barracks to train your troops on the march throughout your country.

It is a big mistake to invade Austria unless you have first conquered (or they are as close to you as family members) Turkey, Warsaw and Sweden. Please take the hint!

[In future issues we will be running strategy tips for other nations in Austerlitz (last issue the tips were for Austria). Of course you may disagree with our writers, in which case we will be glad to publish your views in Rumours from the Front.]

Wasteland of Flint

MARTIN HELSDON reviews a novel that springs from a game ...

SO WHY AM I reviewing a book in *Flagship*?

A review of latest novel by Thomas Harlan in a way forms a sequel to the **Lords of the Earth** Campaign One game diary. Where Thomas' first fantasy series comprised the Alternate History *Oath of Empire*, his new *Sixth Sun* saga, of which **Wasteland of Flint** is the first, is set in an alternate future. This has a strong PBM slant, because the Sixth Sun is based on the Lords One campaign, extrapolated forward five or six centuries into a science fiction setting. It also draws on the old CoreWars campaign that Thomas ran many years ago and his Skies of Tenochca roleplaying campaign.

Whilst novels based on games are now a common publishing phenomena, the Sixth Sun is decidedly different, drawing significantly on the game for background whilst adding numerous extra ingredients. It must therefore be unique in utilising a still-running game world as ancient history. For anyone familiar with Lords One there are numerous references that are immediately apparent, though the appreciation of the general reader won't be adversely affected. I was particularly impressed to discover that my position in Lords One, the Norsktrad merchant house, is still in operation, albeit in off-world exile.

What could have been a standard space opera is given a number of distinct and original dimensions, the most obvious being the domination of Human Space by the México Empire, the descendants of the Aztecs. Humanity is now subject to the México and their allies, foremost being the Japanese Nisei, who in colonising North America many turns ago in Lords One, brought horses, rice and metalworking to the New World. The defeated populations of Swedish-Russia and the Danish Empire have scattered to the Rim World colonies. All of Old Earth, Anáhuac as the México name it, is ruled from the imperial centre of Tenochtitlán. One interpretation of the name México has it denoting the centre of the world, and in this reality the ambition of the Aztecs has found full expression. Human Space, however, is a small sphere compared with the gigantic scale of the galaxy, and the interstellar domain of Imperial México is a minor power in a universe littered with remnants of inimical and ancient alien civilisations.

The basic premise of the story will be familiar to gamers, having a faint echo of one of the first antique Traveller scenarios: Contact has been lost with a starship and the mission is to ascertain the status of the ship and her crew. However, the presentation and expression of it in Wasteland of Flint is sufficiently different to make the novel fresh and, as the questions mount up, a page turner.

What prevents the novel from being a rehash of the old haunted house in space is both the historical background and the gradually dawning of the realisation of the nature of the mystery. Just as Oath of Empire rested on a substratum of Greek and Persian Myth, Sixth Sun has aspects of Aztec mythology hidden beneath it, as well as hints that might tenuously relate to the Cthulhu Mythos. Certain vague resonances stirred memories of HP Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Call of Cthulhu*. Other dimensions of the story also reminded me very slightly of Babylon 5 and its IPX archaeologists 'Exploring the Past to make a better Future.' This is not to say that Wasteland of Flint is derivative, it isn't. At most, aspects of the novel pay homage to these and earlier Golden Age sources.

Wasteland of Flint at a glance

By Thomas Harlan, this is published by Tor Books priced £17.50 or $27.95. ISBN 0-765-30192-X

Contact has been lost with a commercial archaeology team conducting excavations on Ephesus III on the edge of known space. The Company redirects the xenoarchaeologist Gretchen Anderssen and her team, uneasily supported by the crew of the IMN Cornuelle, to find out what has happened. Also aboard is the México political officer and judge Green Hummingbird. When the Cornuelle arrives it finds the starship still in orbit, utterly deserted, and the desperate ground crew still alive. One geologist is missing. Ephesus III itself is something of a mystery: its geology is utterly jumbled, with a massive mountain chain, the Escarpment. running from pole to pole with some of the peaks rising above the thin atmosphere. Fossils found on the planet show early recognisable creatures, but they are totally unrelated to the weird primitive life forms now present. All the signs suggest that the planet suffered a catastrophe several million years before, in a period when the enigmatic First Sun civilisation was active in the galaxy.

Gradually the pieces of the puzzle accumulate. The initial suggestion of a murder mystery driven by academic rivalry is replaced by something much vaster and more dangerous. The backgrounds of the characters, especially Anderssen, a scientist of Swedish-Russian descent, and Green Hummingbird, who demonstrates both the traditions of a shaman and a disturbing knowledge of what has happened, lend conflict to the story, as the disparate characters have to work together to prevent disaster. The dynamic between the scientist and the heir of Aztec sorcerers becomes a major focus, as the two protagonists, entirely different in status and worldview, are forced into an uneasy alliance against the hostile environment of Ephesus III itself.

The central mystery of the planet is ultimately revealed. But for every answer, more intriguing questions are raised, for this, although a standalone story, is the introduction to the saga of the Sixth Sun. According to Aztec myth, the previous five Suns ended in disaster. Future novels will doubtless describe and address the fate of the Sixth Sun. It will be interesting to see how much of Lords One surfaces in future volumes.

Clansmen: The Rebirth

An old classic returns- but has it retained its past glory? WAYNE investigates ...

Resource management. Long-term planning. Resourcefulness. Forethought. Harsh unforgiving environment. Sense of community. Decision-making. Design and Development. Conceptual challenges...
... THESE ARE the words and phrases that first spring to mind when capturing the essence of the **Clansmen** world. As you can see from the above, this is not a game where things happen immediately or where gratification is instant. It takes - in most cases, literally - months for plans to come together and for things to happen: such is life in Clansmen and you either love it or loathe it. Personally I love it, and have done from day one, many, many years ago when I discovered this game.

The game background
Conceptually, Clansmen: The Rebirth is the same as the original game that folded two years or so ago. It is still a half-hand, half-computer moderated, fantasy, tribal roleplaying game, set in a sword and sorcery world and Mark Palin still GMs (as The Puppet Master) the game in his own inimitable, brusque, non-nonsense style.

In common with most fantasy PBMs the usual player-run races are to be found - Human, Dwarven, Elvish etc - but there are some more exotic races available too, if you need a challenge - Lizard-men and Gnomes to name a couple. Needless to say all Races have a list of advantages, disadvantages and traits, which need to be taken into account when creating a clan.

The game is set in the temperate but war-torn world of Lidan, and all player-lead clans start off on a borderland area 'in the shadow between civilisation and barbarism'.

Getting started
In game turns, your clan is just that, a mass of people treated, for game purposes, as 'a herd of creatures'. What gives a Clan its personality is the individual characters, the people with the 'drive, ambition and intelligence' who organise, plan and otherwise lead the masses. There are 13 different Major Skills an individual can have - ranging from a Leader to a Herder, with Priests and Magi being somewhere in-between - and each individual must have at least one Major Skill, but no more than three. This customisation of skills can have some dazzling or disastrous effects depending on what you chose.

I can give you some advice here from personal experience - the Leader/Trader combination doesn't work well at all: in some cases, characters gain experience by being trained by NPC characters and this means visiting other settlements to be taught. Needless to say, your clan doesn't function effectively with its leader being absent and they also get thoroughly miffed (for in-game effects read Morale Loss) if your leader regularly keeps going away on junkets to nice places 'to develop their trading skill', while leaving the clan to plough, construct and do the general dirty work. Mental note to self: don't do this again.

Whilst speaking of creation and combinations, it's worth noting that players get 100 set-up points to spend on creating their clan as a whole

- and believe me it doesn't go far. This covers characters (first one free, then 25 points for each further individual), weapons, beast of burden, clan numbers, armour and the military.

Initially, there are several types of basic troops available to you (Missile, Melee and Cavalry) and each troop type can be Light, Medium, Heavy or Super Heavy. The heavier the troops, the more they cost. Later on in the game, if you have the resources, other troop types can be developed, including Marines, Engineers and various kinds of Artillery.

Overall, planning your start-up so it is viable and actually playable - too many characters/troops and too few clan members is a recipe for disaster - is an essential part of the game. It is worth spending extra time planning, as this will reap benefits in the long run.

Playing the game
Clansmen: The Rebirth is now run on a real-time basis with a week in game-time equating to a week in real life, and this is one of the reasons in-game progress is slow. As I write, turns are due every two weeks.

The order format remains basically the same: you are allowed three 'long' actions - where you can write in detail what you are trying to achieve - and seven 'short' orders, which deal with the more simple and straightforward clan actions.

However, it is here that we see the first of several new, but crucial, changes. The seven short orders were free form, allowing you to write, in one sentence, what you were trying to achieve, but now you have to select them from a list and enter them as per a computer-based order. For example, if I wanted my Trader to concentrate on developing Trading skills, I would have written a one-line sentence describing how I would do it. Now I would simply enter:
Order 4: Webby 3.4 (current trading skill)   Train   Trader

To role-playing aficionados this may seem a bit soul-less, but it's small changes like these that cut down on Mark's turn-processing time, thus allowing him to keep running the game, which I may add he does purely for the fun of it - financially Clansmen will never turn Mark into the new Paul Getty that's for sure! There are always the first three orders anyhow, which allow for all the role-playing you want.

Short orders can be utilised by individual characters or by the clan as a whole, and they range from Movement orders to training up individual skills, as shown above.

Some actions require you to spend Clan Support Tax points (CSTs as they are known in-game), and in some ways these are the lifeblood of the game. Taxation, trading and a host of other ways generate CSTs, and the more CSTs you have the more your clan can get done. This is because CSTs are also used as a measure of labour - it takes 60 labour to build a market-place and thus 60 CSTs - which is ok if you have 200 CSTs a turn (very rare indeed) but not if you only have 40, especially as the clan and its livestock has to be fed and maintained out of these CSTs, too! Developing CSTs is an integral - and somewhat secret - part of the game, and finding out how to make more is an interesting challenge.

Choices
One of the most attractive things about Clansmen: The Rebirth is the options available to you, and the different types of clan playing the game reflect it. Some clans study and make technological advances, other wage constant war with NPCs (and in some cases with PCs), others farm and tend the land, some lead a nomadic life-style, whilst others devote their life to their God and spend their entire existence developing their theology. A few clans do a combination of the aforementioned and more!

Clansmen at a glance

A mixed-moderated fantasy tribal game run as a PBeM by Mark Palin. Turn Fees are £3.50 per turn until turn 20 and £5.00 per turn thereafter. GM Mark Palin is contactable via:
   mp004f8903@blueyonder.co.uk
The Clansmen discussion group/mailing list is
   Clansmen@yahoogroups.com

The only rotten apple in the barrel is if one PC finds out where your clan is located and starts attacking you. This doesn't happen that much, but if it does it can be a resource and personnel draining experience. I have been lucky; I have found a very helpful and friendly player - we already have swapped blueprints and established a trade route between us (trade routes are a good source of CSTs, by the way) - with whom I have entered into a mutual-protection pact. This has already borne fruit as a PC-led group of raiders has thought twice about attacking me when the player saw the size of our combined forces. Another way to avoid PC vs PC combat is to stick to 'your' terrain type - Elves have woodland, Lizard-men have swamps etc - as attacking someone in their terrain type is tantamount to suicide, unless you have overwhelming numbers and vastly-better trained troops.

And changes

Another change in the game is that Clansmen: The Rebirth is run exclusively by email nowadays. I've not always been a fan of email based games, but I must admit it works for this game. The turn results come back in two parts - a Word document (for the written part of the turn) and an Excel spreadsheet (for the clan's development.)

Now, a few years ago I would have dropped this game like a hot potato just because of the very mention of the word spreadsheet, but Mark has obviously designed it with people like me, who are spreadsheet phobic, in mind and it is really easy to complete - if I can do it anyone can do it! It even lets you know when you have made a mistake - impressive stuff.

In fact, the turn-results I have received to date (having played 23 turns in this new version alone) are both well designed and easy to navigate. Each page deals with its own subject (such as construction projects, individual characters progression, research undertaken etc) and all are simple to follow. Each Excel spreadsheet runs to ten or more pages and when added to the two-page (on average) hand-typed part of the turn there is enough information for even the most ardent number cruncher to pore over. That said, the turn-results sheets are not overwhelming and all the required stats are easily found.

Clansmen: The Rebirth: Conclusions

So is this game for you? Well, another player has told me that this game is similar to two games that I have, regrettably, never played: Crack Of Doom and Keys of Bled.

That said, if you are a power-gamer who loves fast clan development, all action turns and instant results then no. If you like to decimate other players, cut a swathe across the continents of Lidan and gain vast amounts of experience for your dominant army, then again no. But if you like planning, cunning, long-term development and forward-thinking realism then yes.

Realism is the key word here. What the current players of this game and I like, and some people will really hate, is Mark's dogged determination to keep the game linked to the real. Large construction projects (ie cathedrals, hospitals) take months and months in real time to build, your clans-folk will get really narked with you if you upset them (and boy will you know it - read on for more details!), not all NPCs will like you while some will not even acknowledge your clan's existence, research can (and will) go horribly wrong, individuals will die painful, ignominious deaths and many of your clan will die en mass, if you don't plan ahead.

Let me give you some examples here. On my first turn I tried a tactic I had successfully used in another tribal game in order to get my crafts-people to produce more trade goods and thus produce more CSTs. My leader said he was implementing new changes in the production of trade goods, by introducing assembly lines, bringing in shift patterns, arranging job-sharing and encouraging people to work on all parts of the assembly line, so they would become 'multi-skilled'. The result - more CSTs? No way...

My leader was informed that the clans people hated this idea and were very close to revolting; the work force went on strike, at least 50% of my clan threatened to leave, as did some of my individuals, morale plummeted through the floor and, furthermore, if I continued with this

idea there would definitely be an attempted coup! The anger generated by my clan literally seethed off the page with a passion! Needless to say I aborted this implementation immediately.

As further examples, my friendly neighbour nearly lost his mage (he was down to his last hit-point!) when some research went horribly wrong and he blew himself up and it took him a few months - in real time - to recover. Another player went to construct a barn and a careless spark mean it burned down losing all the materials he saved to build it. My mage almost did every action in one turn, and collapsed with exhaustion at the end of it - it took him some time to recover!

This is *not* to say that everything that happens in the game is bad, or the game is doom-laden. I just want to point out, that as in real life and unlike a lot of other similar games, bad things do happen. On the plus side, learning from my lesson above, my priest floated the idea of putting a religious hierarchy in place, to make our religion more structured and organised. Initially it was met with a great deal of reluctance by the clergy, but a few turns of explaining the benefits, detailing the structure - thanks goes to the COE website, which has links to the definitive hierarchical church structure that I copied - and discussing this proposal, my priest finally got the go-ahead and we are now implementing it - which will take months in real life.

In the long run, though, it will be worth it. My clan will get bonuses in morale and organisation, and I understand there are certain 'hidden' bonuses too, which I believe is Mark's idea of rewarding what he considers to be good game-play. In addition, there is a great deal of satisfaction to be had when the fruits of your labours actually become a solid entity.

To be frank, Mark's GMing style is an acquired taste. Personally, I like it very much, because it is waffle-free, straight to the point and not overly embellished. Mark is excellent at putting over the way your clan feels en mass, and is just as accomplished at putting over the emotions of each individual character. Joy, anger, fear and satisfaction - they all spring off the page at various stages in a direct and powerful fashion.

Criticisms? Well there are a few, which I have to get off my chest. Winter-time in-game lasts for about four weeks and it finds the world frozen physically, as well as in terms of travel, farming and fishing. Travelling is thus impossible, CSTs go way down and your clan can't hunt or gather food or fodder at all - stockpiling is an absolute necessity. I understand this is a deliberate strategy implemented by Mark to stop clans developing too fast, and I have no problems with that logic, but in my opinion it severely limits the number of things you can do at that time of year.

I also find the ten-order per turn format limiting. With just seven short actions to perform the training of your characters, your troops, construct things, buy blueprints and research things, every action is valuable. I have found myself sacrificing some aspects of my clan's development for others, which has resulted in my clan being woefully lacking in certain areas. These seven short actions become even more valuable when you have to state each turn that your engineer/mage/cleric is researching a project. I would welcome a 13-order turn with the three detailed actions staying as they are, and ten orders being allocated for clan development etc.

When all is said and done, the positives in Clansmen: The Rebirth certainly outweigh the negatives by far. In fact, it's one of my favourite games. Why? Because, in a nutshell Clansmen: The Rebirth is...

Addictive. Absorbing. Thought-provoking. Stimulating. Entertaining. Enjoyable. A Treasure - and most of all Fun!

Lord of the Rings CCG

The Ents of Fangorn

*ERIC RIDLEY looks at a new expansion set ...*

ENTS OF FANGORN is the sixth set for the incredibly popular **Lord of the Rings CCG**. The 128-card set focuses on the battle between the Ents and Saruman's Isengard fortress as seen in the second film. Ents first appeared in the Battle of Helms Deep expansion, but it was only Treebeard that made an appearance and even then he was restricted to being an ally. Now a whole slew of kindling waiting to happen is here. Most of the Ents seen in the film are represented along with many other themes and strategies.

As with previous sets there are the obligatory new versions of old characters, resplendent with new abilities, artefacts and weapons. Most impressive to Timmy power gamer, will be the new version of Gandalf. With a power of ten and wielding a constant +1 damage bonus he can make short work of any wouldbe vagabond/footpad. The cost of this incredible power? Gandalf takes one wound every time the fellowship moves on. With a vitality of 4, you can't allow Gandalf to get wounded even once or he is toast before he reaches the next sanctuary. To compound the misery for the bad guys there is also a new version of his sword, Glamdring, Lightning Brand. It bestows upon its wielder +2 in battle, but more importantly it gives an additional +1 damage: combine this with its ability to make Gandalf a further +1 damage for every spell he casts during the skirmish phase and he is unstoppable.

Other new cards are Galadriel, Keeper of Nenya, Arwen, Evenstar of her people and Elrond, Keeper of Vilya. Elrond and Arwen work together nicely. Elrond can take damage for Arwen and make the minion she is skirmishing -1. Elrond heals at the beginning of each turn. It is a nice combo that reflects the father-daughter relationship between the two. Decipher is really excellent at making mechanics that mirror the source material.

One of the nicest surprises in the set for me is the new Balrog, Terror of Flame and Shadow. It is damage +2 but it is not fierce. Easy come easy go I guess, the thing that makes it awesome though is the fact you no longer need an underground site to play it. Flame grilled Gandalf anywhere on the path.

The real stand out of the set is Aragorn, Defender of the Free Peoples. His card title represents his abilities. Remove an Elf token to make a minion strength -3. If you use this ability in conjunction with cards like Agility, which gives you elf tokens, you can really start to hack down even the biggest foe. I have also been reliably informed that the picture on the card is 'gorgeous' that he himself is 'gorgeous' and 'isn't he just gorgeous?'. Other abilities are the Dwarf-based talent of healing the little buggers by removing tokens. During the regroup phase he can remove a Rohan token to wound a minion twice, but only if Aragorn is mounted. It seems that if used correctly Aragorn can be too powerful
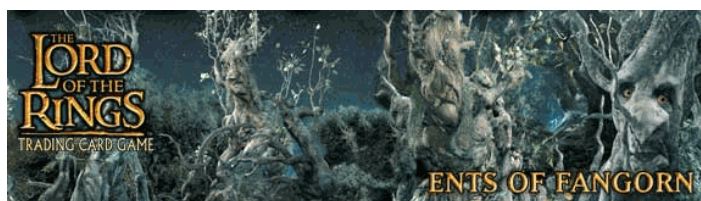
and can be abused. In casual play this shouldn't be so much of a problem but as soon as tournament players get a hold of it he will become an almighty killing machine capable of destroying Middle Earth and taking the one ring for himself. Mwahahahahahaha!

Onto the bad guys. The Isengard Orcs have a nasty new ability to discard other orcs from your hand during the regroup phase to cause the fellowship to wound a companion. If you load up your deck with them you should be able to kill a companion per turn. To make matters worse there are a few conditions that allow you to do even more damage even after discarding the orcs from your hand.

The Nazghul have a few new additions. The Starter Deck only premium card of 'The Witch King, Deathless Lord' is huge, and something to be feared. It has a strength of 14 and is fierce: it only costs 8 to play and if/when kill a companion with him the fellowship must exert a companion. Again it seems as if this card is just a little too powerful. But it certainly is fun to flop down and terrify your opponent with.

Finally we move onto the expansions namesake: The Ents. This is the first set to give you them as companions not just allies. Treebeard is obviously the most recognised and he is represented here fairly well. He has a twilight cost of 5 and a power of 12. He is very big and very expensive. However your problems aren't solved once you slap him down: to make him fight you must exert an unbound Hobbit. This means that you have to have plenty of Hobbits and are able to have them take wounds. The rest of the Ents are fairly unremarkable. They are big and strong and they work best in a bunch, but aside from that there is nothing special about them.

The set as a whole is a lot of fun. It strikes me as a set that would appeal to a lot of casual players: big monsters, big weapons and a new version of almost every one. It is a good starting point for people wanting to jump in. In terms of how useful it will be in tournament play, I imagine it will shake the place up a little/a lot and make the game more dynamic and larger. The themes and abilities match those seen in the film. The card images are sharp and the printing is perfect. It does, however, seem to suffer from the arms race problem that so many CCG's do. It is a constant battle to make the cards from the new set more desirable than the previous ones. Hence gigantic cards and crazy strong abilities.

Before this set was released my love for the LOTR CCG was waning a little. This set came along and rekindled my passion for it; it gave me a lot of fun too. Not without a price, however. In terms of collecting the set, I bought a box of boosters and two starter decks. This set me back more than a hundred quid but I did end up with the whole set bar four cards. The absconders were quickly picked up on Ebay for a total of about a tenner. It is expensive but not all devouring. Just give the curries and scud mags a miss this week and you should be fine.

Favourite Cards: Gandalf, Glamdhring and the Balrog (I am such a munchkin).
Wasted Cards: Spied from Above (all cards have some use in a specific situation, but this one really struggles).

LotR: Ents of Fangorn at a glance

This new CCG expansion adds more play options to existing strategies and cultures, sets up the open environment for the introduction of the Return of the King gameplay, and adds powerful new options for key Fellowship-block strategies. Among the many new challenges introduced in this expansion are a new Treebeard to lead the Ents into battle against Isengard, Gate Trolls to patrol the Black gates of Mordor, and the Isengard Orcs to assert a potent defence against the Ents.

Pirates of the Caribbean

GLOBETROTTER reckons that someone needs to be keelhauled ...

PIRATES of the Caribbean was the last theme park ride overseen by Walt Disney himself. His careful attention to detail earned the ride generations of devoted fans. Recently, that legacy was added to by the release of a surprisingly good feature film bearing the ride's name.

Russian developer Akella's **Sea Dogs** was an innovative pirate RPG that received lavish critical praise. With so much going for it, you'd think that the PC version of **Pirates of the Caribbean** (which is merely Sea Dogs 2 with a name change) would be an easy slam dunk. Think again. Pirates of the Caribbean is a sad mess that not only has virtually nothing to do with the movie or the ride, but is a pretty poor game in its own right. Somewhere Walt is spinning in his cryo-tube.

Let's start off with the obvious. What does this game have to do with Pirates of the Caribbean? Quick answer: not much. Kiera Knightly, who was in the movie, does the narration voiceover for the game, but she's not even playing a specific character. The storyline concerns one Captain Nathaniel Hawk, freebooter and mercenary, unleashed on the 17th century with little more than one ship, a rusty sword, and his wits. After a brief tutorial, the French invade the port he begins the game in, which sets off a story that culminates in the discovery of an ancient artifact and a battle against a shipful of undead sailors. The undead skeletons and the fight against the Black Pearl (the ship from the movie) don't really fit the rest of the story and were obviously shoehorned in to jibe with the movie. On the other hand, the story is actually pretty good and is illustrated with some very effective cutscenes.

The game's also a graphic standout -- although not as much as it could have been. First, the developer focus on the Xbox rather than the PC first becomes obvious when you realize that there's no option to change the game's resolution without quitting and using a separate program. When you do crank up the resolution, though, the game becomes quite good looking. The ship animations are lovely, with sails billowing in the wind, explosions, smoke and fire, and a great sinking effect with cargo and drowned sailors floating in the water. The environments at sea are suitably spectacular, particularly at night with the seas rippling against the hull and a gorgeous moonlight effect. On land, however, things aren't quite as good. The towns and jungles Hawk travels through look good enough (and their looks vary based on their European mother country -- a nice touch), but the movement animations on human models look stiff and unrealistic.

Of course, good graphics and a good story are fine, but they don't mean much without good gameplay to go with it -- and that's where PotC falls down. The freeform gameplay idea is sound enough. You can choose where and when you go, what missions you want to take, whether to work as a government stooge, become a trader or go pirate, and whether or not you want to participate in the story. Unfortunately, most of the non-story based missions are rather boring, as is trading. There's no economic model at all. Every island always trades, buys, and bans the exact same products.

Burn and pillage!

The last, of course, assumes that you actually manage to play the game at all. Put simply, this is a game that's so incomplete and badly balanced that it's almost impossible to play at all.

First, the interface is simply atrocious. The default keyboard setup is nearly impossible to use. Even when the keys are remapped, though, it seems like you have to press an awful lot of keys to do even the simplest things. The buy/sell screen layout, for example, is awful, and makes it really tough to figure out just what's in your cargo hold. Even better, when you buy and sell personal inventory items, you won't be able to sell them unless they've been unequipped -- meaning you have to go to another screen (two or three key presses), unequip the item, and then come back to sell it (another two or three presses). Then there are the things that are simply missing -- like a map of the entire game world. While navigating my ship on the ocean, it'd be nice if I actually knew where I was going rather than sailing at random hoping to find the right island.

It gets even worse once you get into combat. Despite the game's supposed RPG-like emphasis on improving your ability scores, swordfighting is all about reflexes, movement and timing. Players have control over attacking with a sword, blocking, dodging and moving, and firing a pistol -- which would be fine if the game had been an action game. As it stands, though, your control is so iffy that the best you can usually do is hold the block button until you hopefully get an opening to swing your sword. Leave yourself open for an instant, though, and you're almost guaranteed to get hit. Even so, this system would have been okay if you only fought one or two people at the same time. The problem is that you'll frequently be faced with seven or eight people whaling on your back while you're dealing with the guy in front of you. When that happens, it's time to fire up a saved game.

Ship-to-ship combat is better, but not by much. Players can control their ship's rigging and direction against the wind, fire the cannons and select the type of shot they'll use. Unfortunately, even in arcade mode, ship combat is slo-o-o-o-w. That's a problem any sail combat simulation has to face, and most of them do it by adding a control to speed up time. Not PotC, though. Their solution is to let you use the 'sail to' command to speed up time. This sends the ship to a static scene and then back to the combat where the ship you sailed to is right on top of you.

I can't emphasize enough what a terrible solution this is. By the time you get yourself reoriented to the new situation, the enemy ship will have enough time to get off what is essentially a free shot at you. If you've got more than one ship in your fleet, the problem is even worse since there's no effective overview of the battle you can use to plan strategy. There's also no level governor on random encounters (and there are lots of those). It's very common, especially at the beginning at the game, to be confronted by ships or fleets that you simply can't handle and can't get away from.

There are other, smaller annoyances as well. The sounds are nothing to write home about. There's no specific voice recording for the game's dialogue, which means that every character greets you with one of four or five generic greetings. The loops are also repetitive -- some guy in one town kept bellowing something about 'French craftsmanship' over and over so many times it made me dislike the French even more than I usually do. The text is also huge and filled with typos, grammatical errors and obvious placeholder dialogue.

Dead men tell no tales...

The particular tragedy of this game, though, is that it didn't have to be this way. It's a sequel to a good game that could have been well integrated with a good licence. Instead, it seems more likely Disney threw a treasure chest of doubloons at Bethesda to get the game at all ('What do you mean we've got no video-game tie-in?') and even more to get it out early ('This game has to be out when the movie releases!'). As for me, I'm going back to **Tropico 2** and sending another e-mail to Sid Meier to please hurry with his **Pirates!** update.

Lords of the Earth 42

Part 2: SEAN M BOOMER considers his options as Emperor of the Romans ...

WE ARE THE Emperor of Byzantium the Golden, the New Rome, sovereign prince of a thousand lands and peoples by the Grace of God. Scores of princes bow at Our feet, and the world is spread before Us like a carpet of the Mahometans. Or, contrarily, like a draughtsboard such as the Varangars and the Persians use for their contests of cunning and strategy. Like a contestant, We move Our pieces toward the completion of a most praiseworthy goal, the triumph of God's authority on earth against the schemes and plots of the pagans, the infidels, and the schismatics who seek to undermine it and replace it with rank idolatry. Unlike the idyll of the wine-drunk shah and the mead-besotted reaver, however, We face many foes, both human and infernal. All wait to utter the age old cry of victory first heard in the Persian palace of Ctesiphon: 'Shah mat!' - the King is dead.

The Normans spy the Empire from the West, and have already robbed Our predecessors of the Empire's finest land. The Turk rides like Death in Anatolia. In Rome and Frankfurt Matilda di Canossa plays the lyre and the German Emperor dances. The Caliph of Baghdad pronounces his sterile oracles to an enthralled populace, while Our sometime ally, the depraved descendant of Fatima, spins his dark webs in demon-haunted Cairo, drinking in the whispered advice of his magicians and astrologers. On the Danube sit uncounted herdsmen, restless, cunning, agog with avarice and longing for blood.

Victory is not beyond God's people, but should We falter countless souls will be lost to the wiles of the Evil One. It is a hard burden, but We must accept the mantle bestowed by God. We are Alexius Comnenus, successor of Augustus and of Constantine. It is the year 1105, the seven trumps are sounding, and We must hold forth God's banner amongst the infernal intrigues of the Lords of the Earth!

To recap ...

Once again, this is Sean M. Boomer, **Lords of the Earth** player and tutelary spirit of the City, the glorious city, of Constantinople and its Empire - a man with a God complex and a canvas of a few million simulated souls to manipulate for good and ill, glory and horror. Read my game diary, and be entertained ...

Last turn I felt out my opponents as well as I could through email, fortified my borders, made an alliance with the Russians and sought to bring far flung areas of the Empire in closer association with the bureaucracy in Constantinople. Overall, things went well, but not as well as I would like. My reluctance to form the alliance the Crusaders (in particular because of their refusal to hand over Antioch) suggested had weakened relations between them and the imperial court. More specifically, in the words of the first news fax:

There was only one answer: '*Crusade!* Let us march against Constantinople, let us take it by storm and visit the Lord's retribution upon those heretics!' cried Bohemond in council with the great Crusader princes.

Fortunately (or not, depending on one's perspective), cooler heads prevailed... For the first time I tasted the negative consequences of one of the GM's house rules.

In each campaign, the GM is free to embellish on the original rules set designed by Thomas Harlan as much as he or she should desire. LOTE 42 has an added set of diplomacy rules. Relationships between nations are judged along a sliding scale, from low to excellent. This affects the sort of treaties that nations can enter into. In this case, the level of relations between Crusader and Emperor had fallen off, making it more difficult to plan closer relations in the future.

The event also reminded me that the GM of this campaign explicitly takes the characteristics of a given society into account when deciding random events. This is to say, if a given society, such as the Crusaders, is a collection of feuding baronies, there is the danger that individual leaders will 'act on their own' without the consent of the official head of state. The newsfax gives one the impression that the GM made a die roll to decide whether Crusader/Byzantine relations descended into war.

I also experienced some scattered raids by the Turks, received a missive demanding tribute, and was hearing friendly noises from the Crusaders via personal email. I considered the situation. Looking at the game map, the Seljuk Turks had rather little very good land. The only places they could expand into were, well, my own. In contrast, the Crusaders could expand into many different territories as easily as they could into mine. Further, historically, the ranks of the Anatolian Turks were continually swollen by the infiltration of Turks into the plateau of Asia Minor. This would continue unless some definitive disincentive was given. The Crusaders also needed a friend in the area if they didn't wish to be completely isolated.

I decided to make friendly advances to the Crusaders. I offered a dynastic marriage and an agreement of 'cross-border cooperation'. This is one of the treaties that are specific to the rules of LOTE 42. I was, in effect, offering the Crusaders a military alliance and free access to my borders. My correspondent made positive noises then fell silent...

In the meantime, I continued to work on an alliance with Kiev, who still needed my support - the better to keep the sprawling confederacy presided over by the Ryuriki together. I liked the idea of a powerful neighbour to my north, and kept in mind that, historically, the Rus provided a large number of recruits to the Emperor's Varangian guard. While they made the bulk of their contribution a century earlier, it would not be impossible to pique the GM's historical interests with a creative plan and recruit from the northlands once again. I floated the idea past the GM and the Kievan player - while both were sympathetic, the idea did not come to fruition, at least not for the coming turn.

Internally, I decided to continue wooing the leader of Bosnia, who now showed up on my stat sheet as a feudal allied leader. This means that the province in question does not send in cash tribute, but supplies a small number of soldier and a leader. In this case, I wanted to move both province and leader up to full ally (the province supplies both a small army and full tribute), making it ripe for eventual inclusion as a 'friendly' region. I also decided to focus on suppressing the heresy (that of the 'Saracen-minded', who wished to overthrow the use of icons and the authority of the leadership of both Orthodox and Monophysite churches) brewing in nearby Cappadocia, which stood a chance of spreading into my territories. I did this by using my religious operation points (points that can be used to conduct actions of a religious nature) in a 'Crush Heresy' operation - an action that can squelch a heresy on the same or following turn that it breaks out.

As I drew these plans up, I was at a loss about what to do with regards to the Crusaders. The Crusaders still had not responded, and I prepared to set my armies on defence on the eastern border and watch and wait. The Turks still demanded tribute. The night before the turn orders came due, however, unexpected news arrived...

The Crusaders would, after all, ratify a cross-border cooperation

Lords of the Earth at a glance

A commercial PbeM powergame that exists in several separate games covering different historical periods. Game 42 is run by Leslie Dodd. For available places in al LotE games check:
*www.throneworld.com/lords*

agreement, and were friendly to the idea of a marriage. Further, they hinted that they would embark on a war with the Turks. I changed my plans radically. The Emperor's daughter, Maria, was to be sent as a bride post haste. More troops would be raised, and a cautious invasion of Turkish lands would be launched. Since I had no idea of where the Crusaders would be or whether they would cooperate with a Byzantine army, I decided to play the matter out cautiously, invading the coast and reclaiming the cities there (the provinces of Galatia and Pontus and their cities of Sinope and Trebizond respectively). I did not want to lose a lot of soldiers in a bloody siege, so opted to take the cities by passive siege, that is, to starve them into submission. Psidia I would leave until the dust settled (for it seemed obvious, at that time, that the Crusaders might well want to claim the province for themselves).

I kept my fingers crossed, and tossed the dice.

On the surface, it appeared that my plans had gone well. The Bosnians leader, Igor the Fat, had not gone over to being fully allied, but he did not renounce his fealty either. The heresy of the Saracen-minded in Cappadocia was crushed. Roman and Russian relations continued to prosper. The Roman army retook the northern coast of Asia Minor without any losses. A marriage was celebrated between Baldwin I and the Byzantine princess Maria.

A deeper look revealed many setbacks, however. Had I opted to join with the Crusaders in Psidia, the core of the Turkish army (and state) would be shattered. Instead, the Turks held the day and saved this province, the Rum Turk homeland (the game rules treat a homeland province as a special heartland, doubling any national income derived from the area and allowing for negative consequences if it is sacked or occupied by an enemy) from being plundered by the greedy Latins. It seemed certain that they would want to reclaim their lands, and I worried about the superior abilities of the Turkish cavalry, as well as the potential aid that the Rum Seljuks might receive from outsiders. Further, the budding seeds of ill-will between Crusader and Byzantine were additionally watered - it could be interpreted that the Byzantines had abandoned the Crusaders to do all the real fighting!

Internally, the Princess Anna's husband, Leo Maniaces from Isauria,
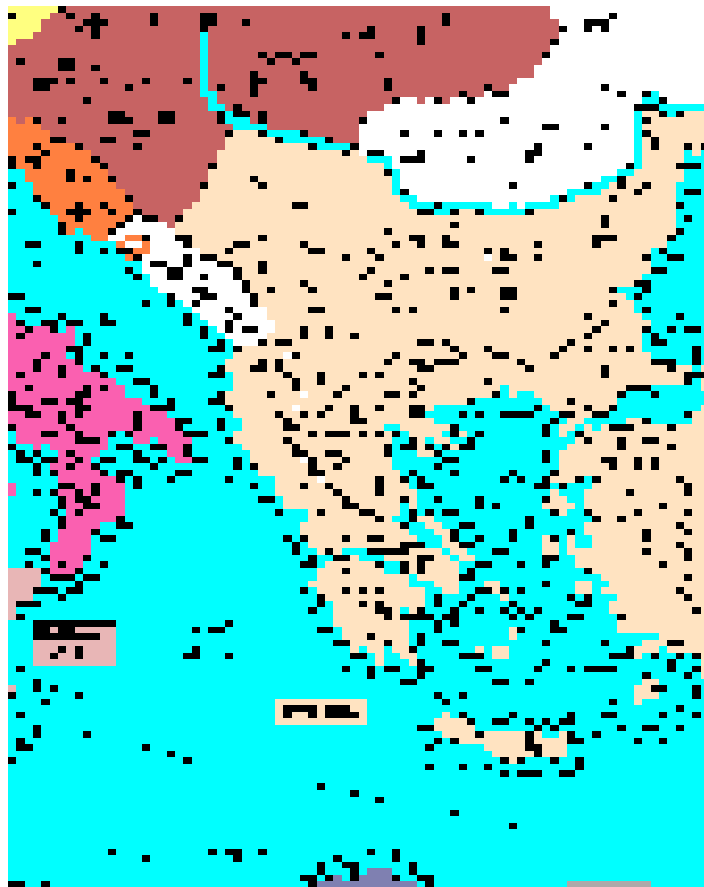
was murdered and there were no leads (except Anna!), both damaging future relations with that province and indicating that sinister forces may be at work in the Empire...

To be continued...

Three New Boardgames and a Sourcebook

ERIC RIDLEY reviews the latest game materials ...

Rifts Dimension Book 6
Three Galaxies
A Phase World Source Book, from Palladium Books, by Carl Gleba
160 page soft cover, £12

THE RIFTS books have always been, to my mind, a good way to present a roleplaying world. Each book examines a different part of the planet/setting and gives all relevant info and some adventure ideas. With the success of the Phase World setting for Rifts it comes as no great surprise that this latest book has been released. It aims to inform the reader about the variety of planetary systems within the three galaxies, namely the Thundercloud Galaxy, the Corkscrew Galaxy and the Anvil Galaxy. Each system is presented with a brief outline of the planets within it and any other notable elements that could be a source of adventure. Each planet is given enough space to present enough information to give the GM some mental meat to chew on, but not so much dry material as to bore the extra large prescription pants off him.

The book opens, strangely enough, by throwing you into an eight page rules set on how to construct your own space station. This is good information and the rules are useful, but it seems strange to immediately, and seemingly without much reason, hurl the reader into new a new rule system. After that opening salvo the pressure is let off considerably as we are taken on a pleasant jaunt through the galaxies. It is pleasurable reading, includes some new rules here and there (for instance the strength and damage causing ability of ion storms) and has plenty of Hook, Line and Sinker ideas.

After that sight-seeing tour, we head into the crunchy bits of the book. There are 16 new OCCs and RCCs (classes and races), which range from Ground Trooper to Skaa serpent warrior. All of these are good stuff, and most are supported by illustrations.

From there we move into the creatures and weapons section. A portion of the creatures seem to be rip offs from the Star Wars universe, but it has some cool new ideas too, like a planet that eats other planets. Each of the creatures is realised quite completely with plenty of information about each. Sometimes, however, the physical description can be a bit lacking.

The weapons section is great: lots of cool new guns and lots of illustrations for them. It is quite incredible that after tens and tens of Rifts books they are still coming up with cool new gadgets and guns. If you are into that type of thing then this section is one of the highlights of the book.

The book rounds off with information about starships found in the Three Galaxies. Each one is fairly distinct with lots of background info about each. They also have a full list of stats and crew rundowns. The book even includes a very large chart for randomly determining what is in the hold of any given ship, which is nice.

When I started reading this book, I was not expecting anything great, but it far exceeds my expectations in every department: it has a lovely approach and is as light or heavy reading as you want it to be. Each section is broken down into digestible chunks and can be read at a relaxed pace. If I were to level some criticisms at it (which I am about to) they would be as follows... The books quite often mentions material that came up in other books, so it would be quite nice to have some kind of book and page reference for those who can't memorise the contents of other books. The cover art is by John Zeleznick: I usually love his work, but this picture is uninspiring and leaves me a bit cold. It almost looks like it is part of a larger picture which Palladium has cut up and enlarged in order to get more covers from the one painting. But apart from those minor niggles this books is great. It is great value for money and provides plenty of ideas for use in any sci-fi campaign. It even includes some scientific data, distilled for those of us who don't have a PhD in astrophysics, an addition that is really nice and helps you understand more about the subject matter. Finally the book fires the imagination, which after all is what you bought it for: a snip at twice the price.
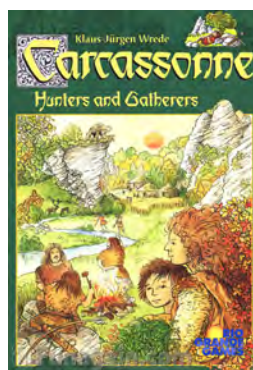
Carcassone: Hunters & Gatherers
Rio Grande Games, £14.99, 2 - 5 players

Hunters & Gatherers is the prequel of sorts to the original Carcassone. For those of you who have not played the original, it was a tile-based game of medieval settlement. So with Hunters & Gatherers it comes as little surprise to hear that it is a tile based game about life in the days of prehistoric man.

The idea is that you each play the part of a tribe of cavemen struggling for hairy backed survival on the plains of Carcassone. The rules are simple: to be the player with the most points after all of the seventy-nine land tiles have been placed. Each turn you place a tile on the table to match up with all the other tiles that it touches. Then you may either place a hunter in an attempt to score points, or pass. You place the hunter on specific geological features such as forests, rivers or plains that appear on the tile you have just placed. Every time a feature is completed you score points for it. For example, if you have a hunter in a forest and the forest is completed, by having a tile placed that closes off any other expandable edges, then you score two points for each part of a forest on the tiles.

The game continues in this bloodthirsty and violent manor until all the tiles are placed, at which point the rules state that a battle between players should occur, the last homo-sapiens standing wins the game. Or indeed you could use the victory point system also included with the game.

This game has seen a huge amount of play with my group since we got it. We haven't enjoyed a game as much in quite some time. It is a blend of luck and forward thinking. The game just draws you in with beautiful pieces and a very simple system. However, it is not a game that requires inordinate amounts of strategic thinking, and sometimes can become a case of just following convention. This could be a problem if you are a major league intellectual, but it causes no such setbacks with me.

Hunters and Gatherers is a fine game and it is a pleasant experience to play, but it may not challenge the more serious tabletop strategists among us. It is simple and fun but it has no real meat to master. This could be a problem, or it may be just what you are looking for.
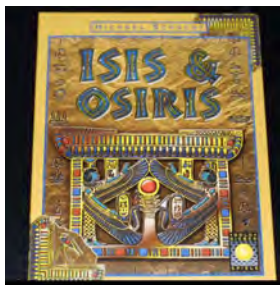
Isis and Osiris

Gold Sieber Spiele, £9.99, 2 - 4 players
Based in mythical Egypt this is a tile-based game of memory and strategy. The idea is to accrue the most points by the time that all thirty-six spaces on the board have been filled. At the beginning of the game you are given out eight game stones and eleven playing tiles, or fewer depending the number of players. Each of the tiles is given out randomly and has a number on the face of between 4 and -4. When you are about to place a tile, turn it over to look at the face to let everyone see it, then place the tile on any of the free spaces on the board. At this point you would do well, and probably better than me, if you can remember where it is placed. The stones you have are your scoring pieces. On each space where there is a stone you score, at the end of the game, all the points on the tiles in orthogonally adjacent spaces.

It is a game of memory and a bit of thinking; the pieces are pretty and well made, and the concept is simple and easy to learn. I have played this game loads of times since I got it, and not one of the people I have played it with says anything bad about it. It is just as strategic in two-player as it is in three or four, but each game has its different nuances. Each game lasts about five-twenty minutes. The only criticism, which could be levelled at the game, is that it can sometimes become a test of memory more than skill, but not very often, and it should not put you off.

I got a German copy of the game with English photocopied rules. I don't think it has been released in this country yet, I may be wrong. Either way it is worth hunting down a copy.

Atlanteon

Fantasy Flight Games, £14.99, 2 players
Every time a new Reiner Knizia game comes out it is an exciting time for mankind as a whole. So you can only imagine my excitement when his latest offering appeared on the shelves of my local game store (I was fighting the need for the toilet).

Atlanteon is a tile placing game for two players, which sees them duel for control of the undersea kingdom's capital. You start the game with eleven playing tiles, all with a different illustration of a watery warrior, and eleven control markers. Also in the game are three tiles to mark castles and strongholds of the undersea world. These start off as effectively neutral and can be captured during the game. The board has spaces to accommodate all twenty-five tiles, and using clever placement of your army you must try to either control eleven tiles, capture all three castles or take control of the enemy's king.

Each turn you may place one of your tiles. If any tile, yours or your opponents, becomes completely surrounded by others then you work out who holds the most influence over that tile. Each warrior tile has a number between 0 and 9 and this is the influence that it has. Add up all the influence of the surrounding tiles including the one in question and the player with the most points gets to place an influence token on the surrounded piece. Do that ten more times and you have won.
Despite what my cack-handed relaying of the rules above may suggest, the game is very simple and quick to learn. The real joy of the game comes when you realise just how much strategy and thinking is required to win. At first it overwhelmed me and I thought it may well fall into the trap of having too much strategy and too many variables, and therefore it would be impossible to exert any control over the game. Only after a few plays does the glory of the game reveal itself.

It is a game that can be enjoyed on many levels; it suits the deep thinkers as much as it does the casual gamers among us.

The artwork for the tiles, the box and the board are all great and convey the atmosphere very well. The problem I have with this game is the price tag to contents ratio. The pieces and board, which are at the heart of the game, are all made from middle of the range cardboard. The wooden tokens for the influence markers and castles are nice, but it still seems expensive for what you get. I find it a big drawback for the game. Mind you at least is not as expensive as a CCG.

If you have some spare cash then get this game you won't be disappointed: it takes only about 15 minutes to play and is fantastic fun. If you really resent paying quite a lot for cardboard (don't play CCGs), then think twice about this game.

The moderators of the fantasy PBeM **Total Conquest** are making an exciting special offer for *Flagship* readers.

They're planning to start a new game of **Total Conquest** for *Flagship* readers only, which will be *completely free*. Yes, you play for free and you're under no obligation to continue after the game ends. Furthermore, even though no fees will be involved, the winners *will* gain 500 credits to continue playing in other **Total Conquest** games and gain an entry in the website's Hall of Fame.

This gives you the chance to compete against fellow *Flagship* readers who will also be new to the game, rather than **Total Conquest** veterans. We'd love to run an ongoing account about how your individual positions are getting along, so if you're willing to join in this then send your reports on the game to *Flagship*'s office address.

There's room for 30 players, with places allocated on a first-come first-served basis. Be quick to apply, before the game fills up! All you have to do to play is mention that you saw the offer in this issue for **the TC-Flagship game**. Everything else you need to play can be downloaded from the website at no cost.

To book a place, email:
silver@total-conquest.com

For more information about the special offer or the game in general write to *support@total-coquest.com* or visit the website at *www.total-conquest.com*

Designer's Angst

CAROL MULHOLLAND confesses ideas for a new PBM game ...

THE TITLE tells you what I'm writing about, but be aware that I'm writing this very much from a personal viewpoint. Other people know stacks more than me about computer-moderation, which is where your only chance of making a reasonable profit lies. So feel free to take all this as a cautionary tale rather than a guide. I'm telling you the problems here, not touting for players.

Some people write novels, some write verse. Perhaps editing *Flagship* should be enough of a word-spinning occupation for me, but here on my own computer I tinker away at ideas for new play-by-mail games. Of course I know enough not to be after fame and fortune, but I very much enjoy researching different possible backgrounds. If nothing else, it's a grand excuse to buy 'useful' books.

I've loved every idea I've played with. In the past I've worked out a system of making a series of city states differ from each other and yet evolve convincingly for an sf adventure game set in the asteroid belt. Along totally different lines, I've worked my way happily through Mayhew, Dickens and Trollope in the interests of a potential Victorian game. (I won't say what sort of game that was going to be, just in case I decide to have another go at it, but I can tell you that Trollope's best novel is saddled with the ghastly title of *Can You Forgive Her?*.)

Of course, when my husband Ken died, as well as losing my lover and my best friend, I also lost my computer expert. With the support of my editorial team I've been able to continue editing *Flagship*, but writing the computer software for a new game is totally beyond me. Yet I can't bear to abandon my creative instincts. So, what to do? One thing that every moderator needs is a reliable system for keeping players' names, addresses and - for a commercial game - their credit details. This, at least, I've already got. But what sort of game could I handle myself?

Of course, rather than invent a turn-based game of my own, it would be possible to run one that someone else has created. If you're interested in becoming a moderator yourself, there's a fair number of PBM games which are run for free or at a very low rate - just enough to cover your costs, if not your time - in the amateur hobby. **Diplomacy**, **En Garde!** and **United** are three very different examples, all of which could be modified to suit your own priorities[1]. There are computer-moderated games, too, where the software is freely available if you run them by email: **Galaxy** is one example, but you can find others[2]. What some keen players have done, too, is to take over running a commercial game that they love.

I don't want to run someone else's design, myself, though. Or to run another computer-moderated game. For me, there's nothing to beat the response from a set of interested and active players, and that means moderating a hand-moderated roleplaying game. Ulp, this is the hardest type of game to run!

It's fairly common now for RPG moderators to supply their players with a shared report for most of the action in a game, usually with players having briefer private details about what's happening to their characters. Various forms of **En Garde!** do this, as do Andy Smith's **Beyond** and Antony Dunks' **Xott Grand**, while a very popular and lively example that's no longer running in PBM form was Steve Tierney's horror game, **Night of the Things**. Rob Harper, too, used this idea in **The Chevian Chronicles**, and Rob also decided that his players' characters would be fairly low in the social scale, which was a notion that I liked. Rob's system is a well-tested one which he is willing for other moderators to use, so I asked him for permission and fell eagerly upon his rulebook[3].

I already had a clear idea for a scenario, and thought that Rob's system would suit this famously. I've nothing against elves, but the usual fantasy paraphernalia leaves me cold. I always tend to start off from some sort of simulation, and I had thought of an historical period which would make an intriguing setting. Well, one that intrigued me, at least.

For a game it's always necessary to adapt what's known of the actual 'historical reality': players need a wide choice of things to do and a chance to influence the history that's being used. Look at this issue's diary from **Lords of the Earth**, as an example of a game with an historical setting that isn't in fact history as we know it.

So what period did I fancy? Well, I thought of starting the game immediately after Cromwell's death (September 3rd 1658), before Charles Stuart was restored as Charles II in May 1660. Frightening months, when just about anything could have happened.

Of course, there are always players who'd know more than me about any period I've chosen: PBMers are an intelligent group. But if I let everyone choose from various factions (Royalists? Levellers? Diggers? Fifth Monarchists?) and make the background atmospheric, they should be able to settle into the game without needing background knowledge. Besides, there are plenty of areas that the historians themselves don't seem to know everything about: folklore and hermeticism, for instance, and there's even a dispute about whether or not C17th women wore drawers. In the aftermath of the Civil War, too, every character can have some sort of personal quest ...

One snag, though, which the Chevian system shares with all hand-mods, is that it's hard work. Rob himself hasn't been running Chevia to a regular turnaround because of real-world commitments, while Colin Forbes started to use the same system but has run into similar problems compounded by poor health. So can I manage to find the time, given my other commitments? I've had a busy summer visiting friends and family, and editing *Flagship* is, quite rightly, very time-consuming. One advantage of the Chevia system is that it's possible to create an underlying calendar of game events before the game begins: with characters starting from the lower classes, the major political decisions won't be theirs to make. Players will need opportunities to influence what happens, though, to stay interested: my game wouldn't be a wargame, no way, but the game calendar will need its decision points ...

One question which is probably bothering you already, is that of impartiality: can I legitimately start to run a new commercial game, as editor of *Flagship*? This is a real worry for me. But I think that I can avoid being accused of favouring my own game by running all its coverage past an impartial observer, and I've asked Mo Holkar to take this role. Besides, the design isn't one where new players can be accepted as the game progresses, so there'll be no need for me to seek ongoing publicity.

Anyway, the fun of designing a new game outweighs any misgivings. I've been able to chat to experts at summer festivals about useful details like C17th costume, folk songs and alchemy. I've found out all sorts of interesting trivia: did you know that General Fairfax was robbed by a female, Moll Cutpurse? That Pepys shaved with a pumice stone? That the day of Cromwell's death, September 3rd, was the same day that he won his battles of Dunbar and Worcester, and so it was whispered by his enemies that he'd made a pact with the devil, who'd come to claim his soul after seven years?

What I'm happiest about is the name of this game: *Cromwell's Ghost*. But will the ghost walk, and will the game run? Work to do, yet, work to do. Such fun!

References
[1] You can start researching amateur games via John Harrington's coverage in his *Mission from God*: just send four 1st class stamps and your address to him at Fiendish Board Games, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 3UW.
[2] Take a look at the free games in: ***www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pbm_list/***
[3] Rob Harper, State of Mind Games: ***rob@stateofmindgames.co.uk***

Open Gaming Licence

Good, Bad or Indifferent?

LISA FORDHAM starts a provocative debate ...

A HOT TOPIC of debate at my local games club of late has been the question of whether or not the D20 Open Gaming Licence is a Good Thing. Not for the first time in my roleplaying career, I am amazed at the strength of opinion expressed by the (mostly male) club members. I though I would set out my views on paper for the club newsletter and see what sort of feedback I got. Here then is both my original article and some extracts from the reams of correspondence which resulted.

'First, for those who aren't really sure: what exactly is the Open Gaming Licence? The easiest explanation is: The Open Game Licence or OGL (as it is commonly referred to) is a copyright licence developed by Wizards of the Coast that complies with the Open Game definition. From the Open Gaming Foundation's website: *'The Open Gaming Foundation believes that a licence must provide for two important features in order to be an Open Game licence. 1: The licence must allow game rules and materials that use game rules to be freely copied, modified and distributed. 2: The licence must ensure that material distributed using the licence cannot have those permissions restricted in the future.'*

To make it more clear, this means that the OGL provides writers with the right to use the D20 framework (things like levels, skills and feats based on D20 roles) without paying a licensing fee. This brings some positive effects for many folks:

It allows start-up companies to publish material without paying through the nose for licensing privileges. Some companies may not have been able to accomplish this had the OGL not been in existence.

What has this accomplished? Wizards of the Coast, in return, gets a whole bunch of modules/games they can consider as "expansions" of their own game. And, therefore their customer base has more to work with and WOTC looks good in their "support" of small business. High supply works well for the buyer. Or does it?

The problem with the OGL is not the OGL itself, but that there is a powerful draw towards it because of the large audience that DND provides. So therefore, every game starts putting out a D20 edition, hoping to tap into that market. There is tentatively nothing wrong with that, except that each game starts to become basically the same. The only differences are the clever combinations of skills and feats. After a while, it becomes boring. To me, the attraction to roleplaying is its diversity. So what does this do? Obviously the first problem is that

this only attracts a few gamers, as most people who play other games are tired of the standard system and are looking for something different, something intriguing to keep their interests.

The result of all this is that no new people are being drawn into the gaming world, where the mainstream players are largely the same people. But, they are getting older and have less time to actually devote to roleplaying. And let's face it, the companies are trying to make money, that is the whole idea behind publishing after all. And, if at some point, WOTC wants to revoke the OGL, all the small companies who just barely squeak by with OGL-based material, will go out of business as well.'

That was the article as it appeared in the monthly newsletter of my local games club. My intention had been to write a very general article on the Open Gaming Licence (OGL), exploring the issues it has raised. After getting a flurry of very strongly worded feedback, I reread my article. I profess that my intention wasn't clear and it looked as if I was saying these issues were fact, not questions asked. I present some of these opinions below (with the permission of the authors, whose names have not been revealed). I want to thank everyone who wrote to me, even for the new words I can now add to my vocabulary.

One of the issues raised by my readers was the concern that I misunderstood the difference between the OGL and the D20 licence, which protects the use of the D20 symbol and standardises the use of the D20.

* *'Firstly, the OGL does not simply mean the d20 system. The OGL is a licence, nothing more. It can be used with any gaming system. If they wanted to, Steve Jackson Games could release GURPS under the OGL. White Wolf could release World of Darkness. The Open Gaming Licence and the d20 System Trademark Licence are two entirely separate things. This is entirely true. However, the OGL, as it is being used now, is primarily for D20 material. After all if a publisher wanted to create something original, not involved in the D20 system, they wouldn't specifically need the OGL would they?'*

* *'OGL... is really an un-needed licence, as an independent gamer can derive the same benefits that OGL provides by declaring his or her*

work open source under a variety of the available open source licences, or by creating a new open source licence with the aid of a copyright attorney. This really became a concern when I raised the issue that should WOTC (or their parent company, Hasbro) decide to revoke the OGL, it could harm independent publishers, seriously.'

* 'I'm writing to correct a serious misconception you've stated as fact in your recent column, "Open Gaming Licence: Good, Bad, Or In-Between." ... The Open Gaming Licence cannot be revoked. Nothing that has been published under the OGL can ever be "taken back."'

* 'WotC cannot revoke the OGL; by its very nature the Open Gaming Licence can never be revoked (regardless of the fact that they wrote it in the first place). They can revoke the d20 Licence, which is not the same thing. The d20 Licence simply dictates what must be done to use the d20 logo. Anything that has been released under the OGL (which includes the d20 System SRD) is forever open and cannot be revoked. If WotC decides to end the d20 licence, companies will no longer be able to use the d20 logo - but they will be able to continue to use the d20 System SRD, since it was released under the OGL.'

I received many other emails covering much the same ground, though in somewhat more colourful language. First, I should make one thing very clear. I did not mean the WOTC would revoke anything that was already in existence or being published at the time. They could, however, decide that no future content that meshes with that under the D20 licence be used under the OGL. I will concede that this is fairly unlikely, especially given that the OGL is a perpetual licence (which implies it was designed with longevity in mind), but anything is possible when it comes to business decisions. So I worded it poorly when I said the OGL would be revoked, for that I apologise.

Now, before you think I am completely against the OGL, it has many positive aspects. It allows companies to use such material legally, where before some companies would do so anyway in thinly disguised ways of avoiding copyright violation. It allows for a better quality product and that in itself is pretty good.

For WOTC it reinforces the Core books by providing a huge variety of support material at little or no cost to them. Of course, this is their main concern as it should be, but it also has a side benefit. It shows them in a positive light, making this available to new people in the industry. It's always nice to be viewed as beneficial.

I was also taken to task for stating that using the OGL can add to the industry's stagnation with all products being mostly the same. To show what I meant, here is another comment.

'OGL is keeping the independent game design movement to a minimum by channelling game designers towards an attractive licence. With the exception of a handful of companies, there is no evidence that D20 is inherently more profitable than independent game creation for the game designer. In fact it may even be a drain on the resources of an independent game designer diverting creative resources when the designer would be better off marching to his own drum...'

So, yes, it is true that the OGL doesn't limit the creativity of design in and of itself, but it makes it more likely. And, this is my personal opinion, others may differ and that is what makes an industry so diverse.

Basically what I am saying is that the OGL has both its positive and negative aspects. To think it is wholly one or the other is either naive or arrogant. I do believe that we need to start having more diversity in our products to better attract new people into the industry, but that should be up to everyone. I can't just blame that on these licences, though they make it easier to streamline and stay more or less the same.

I would love to hear what others think about this. I don't profess to have all the answers, but we need to start working on these issues, before the current members of the community get too old, myself included, to play any more.

In the future, I would like to pursue these issues in another article, so feel free to give me some feedback on all this. There are serious concerns underlying all this that need to be addressed by the gaming industry as a whole.

The History of Monsters

ANTONY DUNKS, on creating convincing danger ...

IN WRITING about 'monsters' I should first explain I mean those things encountered in RPGs and then quickly explain by that I mean organic RPGs not the digital sort. If you do not know the difference, then you are probably reading the wrong article. If you think there is no difference, then you are certainly reading the wrong article, possibly even the wrong magazine.

Monsters can be almost anything that the GM puts into play to hinder, obstruct or simply annoy the players. They range from things such as the simple though far from innocuous spider, encountered while pulling on a boot, or slipping into a bedroll, through the rapacious band of Orcs that waylay travellers on a quiet section of the highway, right up to the post adolescent egomaniac female Elf whose sartorial style tends to consist only of leather or lace, both in minute quantities. Yet despite these obvious differences, they all have one thing in common. A Past, a Present and a Future (okay, three things).

The Past of a monster is that which explains how it came to be where it was, what it had done to bring it to the right place at the right time, to encounter the characters. The Present is simply how it will react on meeting them. The Future will be what it takes from the encounter and how this will alter its life. I am not suggesting that for every single being that a GM puts in his game, pages of background need to be written, in many cases nothing need be written at all. However, the monster does not pop out of thin air, interact with the party and then disappear never to be seen again, it must have existed prior to its encounter with the characters and will presumably do so afterwards. Of course if you are involved in one of those games where every encounter results in a dead monster, then not only is the concept of a Future redundant, so is your reading any more of this article.

Using the previous three examples of monsters we can explore how the Past, Present and Future are relevant to each, starting with the spider.

An encounter with a spider, poisonous or otherwise, is usually the result of a light PBM turn in need of some serious padding out, or a slow section in a face-to-face game. Being a simple and abundant creature, there is not need for a Past for the spider, there is no reason for it being in the bedroll of the Barbarian, it is just one of those things that the die roll came up with. Its Present is forced upon it, when the Barbarian goes to bed and slips into the bedroll: the resultant bite on the backside not only surprises the Barbarian, but gives him an excellent opportunity to discover which of his companions will be a true friend and suck the poison out. The spider's future is rather gloomy, no doubt suffering an encounter with the heel of some boot or other and becoming a mess comparable to one of Jackson Pollock's better works. In this example, the GM has no extra work to do: the spider was brought into being, interacted with the party and moved on, in this case to the afterlife.

An encounter with a band of Orcs is somewhat more complicated. In writing their Past, the GM has to decide what brought them to being where they are. Are they a group of bandits, for whom this is just the latest in a string of highway robberies they have committed over the past months, or are they just a group of native hunters, who having fallen on lean times have taken to an opportunistic raid? Whatever is decided will affect what happens next, what happens in the Present. Let us assume the former, that these Orcs are experienced in robbing travellers upon the road. In this case they will have chosen their location carefully and be working to a plan that has been successful in the past. They will be equipped to deal out death swiftly by bow or spear, hopefully taking out half their targets before they close to melee. The attack will be efficient, co-ordinated and unless they have misjudged the ability of their target, it will also be successful. In the unlikely event of the fight turning against them, then their fall back will be along prepared lines, one that could include leading any would be pursuers into a prepared trap. On the other hand, if the Orcs are just natives, so desperate for food that they have taken to attacking travellers on the road, then their attack will take a completely different form. It is very likely that these Orcs will only be armed with hunting weapons, bows spears and the like; any melee weapons will be crude or makeshift. They certainly will not be skilled in hand to hand combat; all their training has been to track and bring down wildebeest, mammoth or other prey animal. Their attack will consist of thrown weapons only. If this does not achieve their aim, they will run off, rather than stand and take part in a fight they know they cannot win. Let us, however, assume that they have been lucky, and killed a horse, a beast of burden or other animal that was with the group: there is nothing the characters can do for the beast and so they leave it, moving on with what ever mission they are on. The native Orcs can then return sometime later, a time they feel is safe, to butcher the dead animal. Alternatively, suppose by some unfortunate strike, a character had been killed, the ability to raise him from the dead not being within the group, he would have been buried by his companions, after which the group moved on. If the Orcs were really desperate they may even resort to digging up the fallen character: after, all meat is meat.
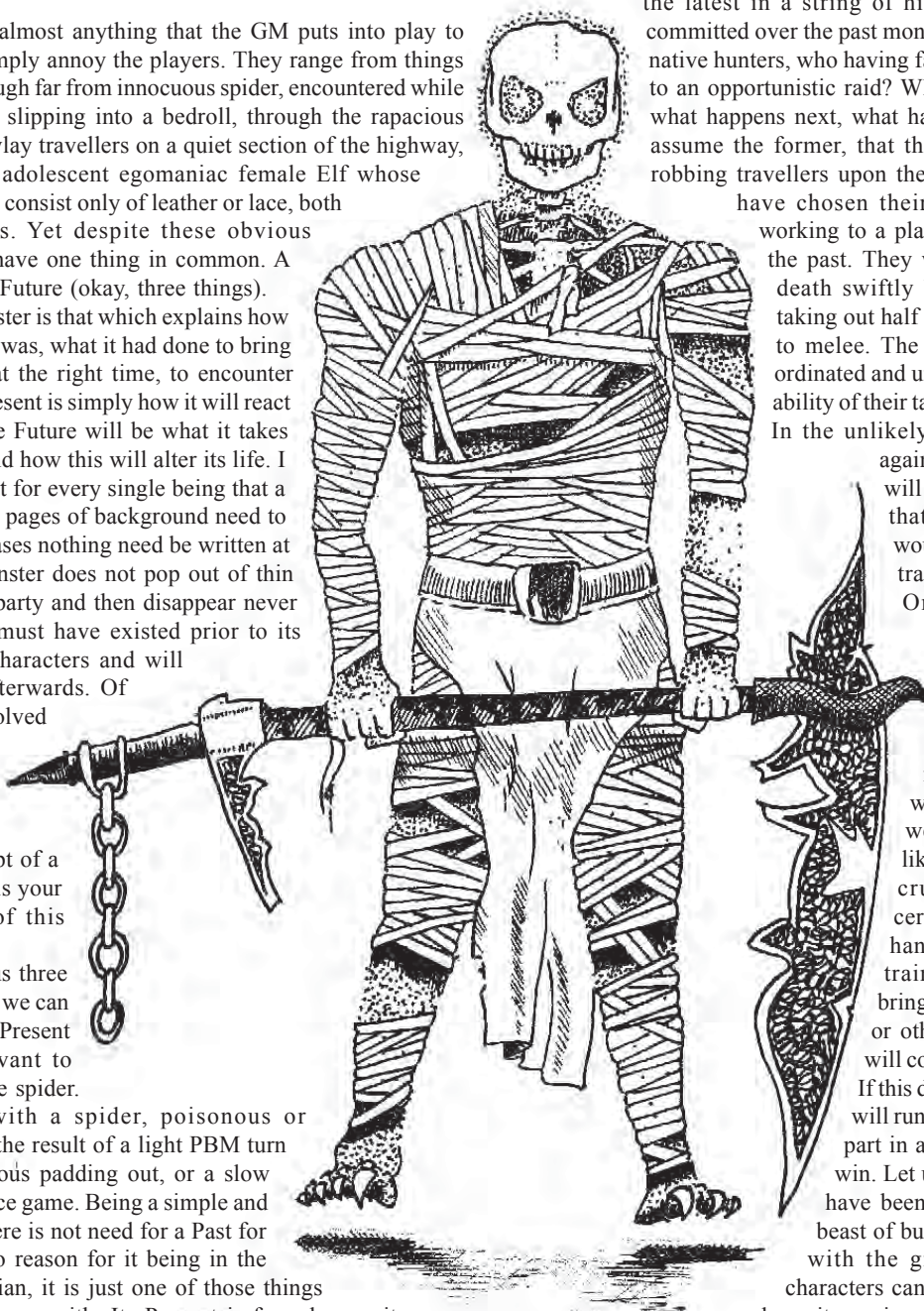
Just as the Past for each of these two Orc encounters was different, and so made the Present different, the same will be true of the Future. If, in either case, the Orcs were the losers then they would have no Future, so let us assume that on this occasion, they were the victors. In the case of the bandits, they will plunder the bodies of their latest victims, adding the looted equipment to their own and being made richer for any money found. Now the bandits are armed with more weapons, possibly superior to those that they previously possessed; they have money to replace anything lost, or even buy new items; they have the added confidence of another successful raid and if the game system supports it, increased their personal experience points, so making future raids more likely to succeed. For the native hunters, success will mean the killing of an animal belonging to the characters, which they may well have abandoned before continuing on their way. The natives return to the scene of the attack and take their fill of the dead animal. Spurred on by their victory the native Orcs may well plan a subsequent raid, waiting for the next travellers to come along the road, though now their tactics change, deliberately attacking any animals that are present and then quickly falling back, to return later and butcher their kill as before.

The point here is that monsters learn, not only from their mistakes, but their victories too. There is reason for what they do, and unless the experience is novel for them, they should display a degree of competence in carrying out their actions.

Finally we turn to the last example, which is somewhat more complicated, in fact far too complicate to cover in any detail. We can only guess what sort of Past such a female would have had to make her the male-hating egomaniac with a desire to wear only underwear in public, though there is a good chance it involved an establishment run along the lines of St Trinians!

This type of monster is unique (or at least she should be) and as such the GM will probably have already put in the effort in creating her. She, more than the Orcs described earlier, needs a comprehensive background explaining her Past, while the GM will have a good idea of how she will react with the characters, her Present, as well as what will come afterwards, her Future. As part of this background, the GM should have thought out any interaction with the party at length, most likely as part of some ongoing story or campaign.

Monsters are not a small part of a game, added on at the end as an afterthought. Instead they are the core, around which a game is built, and as such, they should be treated accordingly. Each is a small story waiting to be read, be it only briefly. The GM should have at least some small idea about the Past of each monster they present to their characters, knowing their Past determines not only the Present, but also the Future.

Monster Mash

A guide to online resources by COLIN FORBES ...

'WRITE a short piece covering online monstrous resources', cried our beloved editor. Not a problem, I thought, easily accomplished. But hang on ... it's not as easy as that. Once upon a time the first port of call for any GM or game designer looking for a monster idea used to be the classic Net Book of Monsters. However even an extensive work out of the Google search engine revealed nothing but broken links to this once great resource. If anyone can find a site where the NetBooks are still maintained, please let me know! Meanwhile my search continued to throw up one or two interesting sites - but these are few and far between and, on the whole, poorly maintained (if at all).

The best site I have found thus far is *www.rpghoard.com*, which maintains a database of monsters for **Dungeons and Dragons**, **Rifts**, **GURPS** and some miscellaneous creatures which could be adapted for any purpose. I am however unsure as to whether this site is open source or not, so you should check carefully if you plan to use any of this material for commercial purposes.

Happily a cyberspace correspondent turned out to have saved a copy of the **Net Monstrous Compendium**. As an example of its contents I therefore present:

THE BLACK STRANGLER
Stranglers are black humanoids, usually of human size. They take the form of a region of darkness with sharply defined features, looking like a caricature from the side with a pointy noise. They have a dull red glow emanating from their eyes and mouth.
***Combat***: *Stranglers rely on misdirection. If need be one of their number will engage or distract a party from one side while the others sneak up from behind. If they successfully sneak up behind they get one roll to hit (with normal bonuses if they apply) with their sole weapon, a length of metallic looking chain. Victims who are "hit" successfully will begin to take a 1d6 each round and in any case will die at the end of the fourth round. They may attack the Strangler at -2 until that time. Stranglers who fail to hit will try to distract other party members from the stranglers who were successful. If all miss and they cannot get behind anyone, they will withdraw.*
Habitat: *Black Stranglers are victims of a curse and are a form of undead. The victims of a strangler rise as a strangler after a period of days. When they rise, their chain will form at that time as well. The chains are related and cursed. Possessing any one of them will attract all other members of a given strangler pack. Possessing the chains will also lead the owner into strangling people in time in a fashion similar to the manner that the bite of a werewolf results in the victim becoming a werewolf. The chains are valuable for they are almost unbreakable. Removing the curse on any of the chains will remove the curse on all of the chains from a given pack, however doing so releases a strangler who is invisible, and immune to normal (non-silver, non-magical) weapons and who has armor class of 2 and 8 hit dice.*
Ecology: *Black Stranglers are undead and have no place in nature.*

[Postscript: Good news! A site which still maintains over 360 open source Net Books has subsequently been found by the author.
www.fortunecity.com/victorian/byzantium/55/]
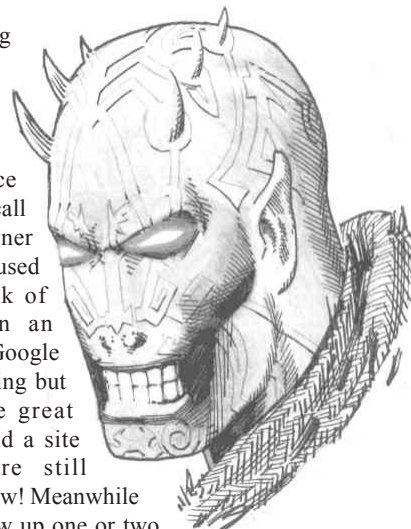
Memoir of a Cyborg

The Magic Fairies That Save Us from Playing Handball Solitaire

DAVE PANCHYK describes the options for running an RPG online...

WE ARE ALL of us cyborgs: we choose virtual communities and pursuits to make up at least part of ourselves, rather than be defined by the dominant forces of society immediately surrounding our physical bodies.

Roleplaying in the vastness

There are several ways in which we can use the Internet for roleplaying, either with people we already know or with people we find in its great expanse. People are the core element, but there exists technology to facilitate several sorts of roleplaying, from the freeform to the fully-graphical.

Messages in the ether

One of these cyborg components is the 'message' based game. This one's problematic even in its name. People can roleplay by sending email messages to the entire group. That makes it 'play by email', but that overlaps with PBM games that have switched primarily to email systems for communicating turn orders and results. Some of them are played by posting messages to a forum, but 'play-by-post' is right out because it can be confused with physical mail, and not all games are play-by-forum. So I'm putting my foot down and calling them all message-based games (but not 'play-by-message', because that'd be 'PBM'... grr).

The biggest problem with this kind of cyborg limb, though, is they keep bloody falling off.

Say a GM comes up with the idea of running a game in which a Star Trek vessel ends up in the Star Wars universe. He or she puts up a web site, announces it to the PBM list (which then auto-posts to the PBM Usenet group) and one or more gaming sites, gets a number of players creating characters (involving numerous rounds of correspondence), starts up with one or more marvelous sequences of play... and then the game collapses under its own weight as the GM burns out or gets distracted by Real Life(tm).

It's enough to make one want to bolt on a Dalek arm and scream 'Exterminate! EXTERMINATE!' while laying waste to the dead wood in Yahoo! Groups.

This is not to say that all message-based games are doomed to fail: some are better-organized than some commercial PBMs. It's just that the signal-to-noise ratio, to borrow the electronics term, tends to be fairly low.

People are people - and indispensable

This remarkable inertia affects just about any online venture, in fact. Call it the inevitable human factor: other people must be present in order for you to roleplay. Think of it as hitting a ball against a wall: if all you're doing is interacting (sending out the ball) with an automated system (the wall), you're stuck in a lonely, existential world. Pock, thump. Pock, thump. If somebody else is in the same environment, hitting their own ball against the same wall, then at least you have some social interaction—and regardless of how retiring we feel we are, we almost all need that.

Remember this hitting-the-ball analogy: I'll be stretching it further anon.

Real Time: the magic of internet fairies

Message-based roleplaying games use Internet apparatus to basically approximate what play-by-mail does: present input from one or more players which is then responded to with input from the rules authority. You whack the ball, and after a pause there is the thump of the ball hitting the wall, and after another pause (sometimes of indeterminate length) the ball returns to you.

To many Internet denizens, this is known as 'lag' and is considered a Bad Thing.

Of course, the near-instantaneous nature of the Internet has created a huge population of people for whom instant gratification just isn't fast enough. Even so, those pauses inherent in message-based games allow entropy and inertia to creep in.

A technical note: originally a U.S. military project to provide distributed command communications in case of a nuclear (or under George W Bush, 'nukuler') war, the Internet uses copper telephone wire to allow extremely wee fairies to carry bundles, or 'packets', of information between computers. These packets communicate meaningful instructions from one client (a gnome that gives instructions to fairies) to another client, sometimes through a complicated magical fae kingdom called a server. A discussion of the clockwork flying monkeys Microsoft unleashed on the Internet and their bitter, unending war against the Fair Folk is beyond the scope of this article.

The bottom line is, depending on how much information you're trying to send, two similar client programmes on two different computers can communicate pretty much instantly across any distance. This allows for systems that bring us closer to approximating what for most of us is the 'truest roleplaying experience: gaming face-to-face with other people.

Chat: talk is cheap

The most basic way of having a number of people in each other's virtual presence is by using a chat program. The venerable daddy of these is IRC, or Internet Relay Chat, which uses client programmes like mIRC. It's much easier to chat using an instant messaging programme like AIM, which allows one to create one-off chat 'rooms' in which to play. The problem: though you've got virtual presence and the ability to talk back and forth, you've no way of replicating the rest of the pen-and-paper, tabletop roleplaying game experience, that is, dice and maps and miniatures. In other words, you have several people, and a ball to share, but no wall—no system—against which to hit it.

There are a couple of solutions.

'Freeform' gaming is basically roleplaying without rules; it relies on the social contract among the players rather than any codified set of mechanics. There may be several of you sharing a ball, but now there's no wall. We have something more like the egalitarian hippie non-sport of hacky-sack.
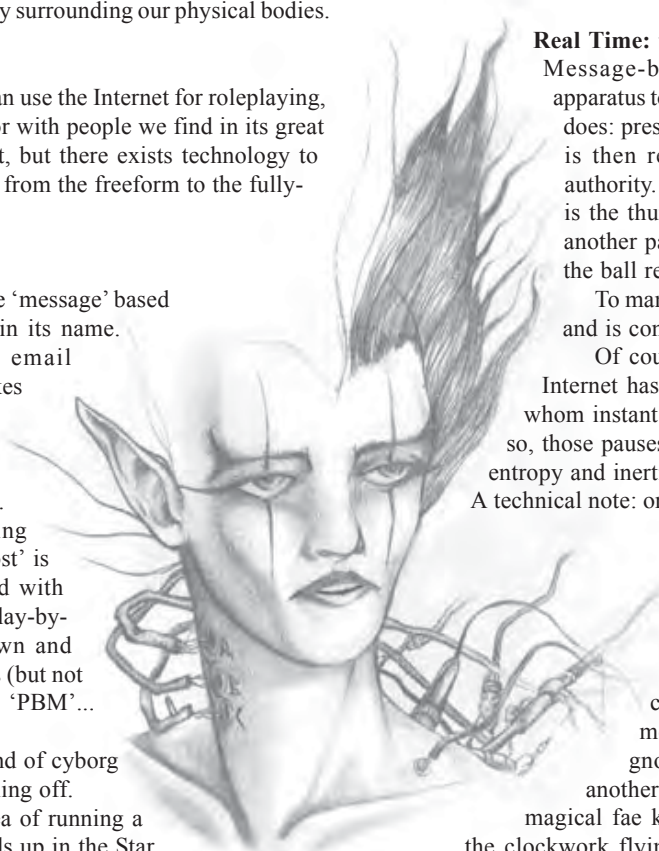
Message-based freeform does exist, but it's more properly considered as interactive fiction. Freeform is used online out of necessity; on America Online, the devoted community of such gamers arose as other outlets on the service were priced out of reach then excised altogether. The available half-measures include instant messaging for private conversations and a virtual dicebag at AOL keyword 'dice'. The free AIM client has very basic die-rolling capabilities, and mIRC has none, although several add-on programmes or 'dicebots' exist.

Everything but snacks: the virtual gaming table

A couple of solutions have emerged to more fully create a virtual gaming space. The best of these is WebRPG, which at time of writing became a free service again. The always-free option, OpenRPG, is practically as full-featured, if more temperamental and without as much community support.

Of course, the community is only of interest if you're trying to find new people to play with. The virtual table is ideal if your gaming group has scattered to the four winds and you want to keep in touch and game together.

Both WebRPG and OpenRPG offer not just chat, including private whispering, but have built-in dice rolling and a 'map' area for demonstrating pictures or for laying out combats with virtual tokens for player pieces. There is also a shared file space for game rules and character sheets.

There is a for-pay virtual gaming table called Klooge Werks that those with simple Internet connections and deep pockets may wish to try; a friend and I couldn't get it to work easily on our router-using broadband connections. Routers are like fiendish labyrinths on the Internet. Packets get lost; fairies go to their certain deaths. I don't want that on my hands.

The future of gaming

I can say with certainty that anyone who makes pronouncements about 'the future of gaming' will be made to look an utter prat. However, **Neverwinter Nights** has recently been called that. It among the AAA computer game titles has the ability for someone to run a game in a 3D environment. The Aurora toolset, though horribly underdocumented like most such programmes, allows one to create new environments, NPCs and objects. For my money, it's rather like creating one's own wall out of brick and mortar to thwok the ball against, but there's no denying the end result is visually impressive.

Getting the most from your enslaved fairies

The demands on a computer increase with the 'wow' factor. Message-based RPGs you can run through standard email or browser programmes, and they don't require a continual Internet connection. Chat programmes like AIM are easy to install. WebRPG and OpenRPG are not large programmes, they require Java or Python (respectively—both are free and modest-sized downloads) to run. Neverwinter Nights is a monster; system requirements are quite high and there are curious hardware incompatibilities. The simpler solutions are increasingly less dependent on running a Windows-based machine, as well.

Really, the fairies are always there and ready to be put to work. The greatest effort goes into finding and sifting through potential players, if one doesn't already have a group. But taking the tabletop RPG online may just be the cyborg organ or limb that fits a hole within your roleplaying self.

Some Hopefully Useful Links:
Yahoo! Groups: *groups.yahoo.com*
The PBM List: *www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pbm.html*
Usenet's *rec.games.pbm: groups.google.com* **(from which you can access** *rec.games.pbm***)**
WebRPG: *www.webrpg.com*
OpenRPG: *www.openrpg.com*
The author is so terribly lonely: *dpanchyk@hotmail.com*

The Online Revolution

ALEX HARRIS describes what's out there ...

WITH THE recent launches of Sony and Microsoft's online services and the announcement of several high profile online games, it looks like the long-heralded arrival of online gaming may finally be about to occur.

Online console gaming has been a long time coming, and after the disappointments of the Dreamcast's largely unfulfilled promises there are some games fans that still remain sceptical about its viability, and indeed value.

Of course as most PC gamers will tell you, online gaming is hardly a new development. PC owners have been able to play games such as **Quake** online since 1996, although much of its popularity can be attributed to the release of **Half-Life** in 1998, and subsequent 'mods' (modifications of the original game including new play modes) such as **Team Fortress** and **Counter-Strike**.

There are a number of reasons why online gaming is so popular, but probably the most compelling is that it offers a completely fresh gaming experience. When playing against the computer you can learn the way it 'thinks', and in time predict how opponents will react. Obviously this isn't possible when playing against real people.

Teamwork is another strong advantage. Games such as **Counter-Strike** (PC), **Ghost Recon** (PC & Xbox) and **SOCOM: Navy Seals** (PS2) encourage players to work together to achieve goals. The introduction of voice communication has taken these types of games to another level, with players able to issue commands and plan manoeuvres while carrying on with their game.

It isn't just shooting games that can be played online. Online

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roleplaying games such as **Ultima Online**, **Everquest** and **Dark Age Of Camelot** *(see screenshot above)* are extremely popular, allowing thousands of players to develop their online characters in an evolving virtual world. Players keep their character between games, so they can build up relationships and carve out their own place in the game world.

The success of online gaming on the PC has resulted in the creation of thousands of 'clans': online communities where members play together and talk online about topics both games related and otherwise. The advantage is that players make friends online, developing a camaraderie that improves the online gaming experience.

One of the great things about online gaming is the incredible diversity of games that are available. For PC owners online play modes are the norm rather than the exception. In addition, developers often make their game code available so that fans can develop their own 'mods'.

The PC 'modding' scene is huge, with thousands of amateur coders producing add-ons for their favourite games, the vast majority of which are free. The most famous mod is undoubtedly Counter-Strike, which alters the Half-Life engine to include team-based battles where players join two teams (terrorists or counter-terrorists) and try to achieve specific objectives. Counter-Strike has grown from relatively humble beginnings to become the most popular online game in the world, and a retail version will be released for the Xbox shortly.

While in many ways the PC offers the ultimate online experience in terms of quality and diversity of software, the Xbox (and to a lesser extent the PS2 also) is following, and has the advantages of simple set-up and a level playing field due to standardised machine configurations and the insistence on a broadband internet connection.

Microsoft's Box Live! service has made an impressive start, with some excellent titles (**Moto GP 2**, **Ghost Recon**) and useful functionality, including a 'Gamertag' system which makes it easy to send friends game invites even when they are playing a completely different game.

Unfortunately, the biggest barrier to online gaming is not convincing people that it's good to play online, but providing them with an internet connection with which to do so.

Most online gaming really needs a broadband internet connection (in fact Xbox Live and the PS2 Network Adaptor are broadband only), and these are still far from common in the UK.

Most broadband connections still cost around £20-30 per month, and even when people are willing to make the investment they may find that their chosen provider is unavailable where they live. However, in May, Oftel claimed that 2 million UK homes now have broadband access, and that figure is expected to rise considerably in the next few years.

Online Gaming: A Summary

PC
Cost: None, although some games may charge monthly fees.
Pros: The most advanced online gaming platform with a multitude of online games and mods
Cons: Set-up may be daunting for those not comfortable with a PC. Cheats can spoil some games.
Internet Connection: Any.

Xbox Live!
Cost: £40 for a 1-year subscription.
Pros: Excellent service with free headset. The infrastructure is well laid out and simple to use.
Cons: Microsoft's package is not free. Future subscriptions are expected to cost around £30 for a year.
Internet Connection: Broadband only.

PS2 Network Adaptor
Cost: £25.
Pros: There's no connection charge.
Cons: As yet the service lacks quality titles, and is not as easy to use as Xbox Live!
Internet Connection: Broadband only.

Gamecube Online
Cost: £35 (broadband or modem network adaptor).
Pros: There's no connection charge.
Cons: So far Nintendo's online plans aren't entirely clear, so it is difficult to predict how successful it will be and how many online games we might see on the Gamecube.
Internet Connection: Broadband or dial-up modem.

The Paper Time Machine

Where WAYNE finds himself trapped for several hours in the world of games gone past ...

IT HAPPENED so suddenly, so immediately, that I still can't believe it. Some people call it 'alien abduction', others call it a 'time slip', but all I can tell you is that one minute I was attempting to pull down shelves in my living-room and the next I was transported to an age gone by, long, long ago. This was a place where the time-line continually swirled and twisted, so all sense of linear time was lost. I emerged from this world-gone-by almost five hours later, an emotional and mental wreck, but it is my duty to report what I experienced, so please read on ...

The place I was transported to was a world where roleplaying and PBM overlapped. Here the likes of Bob Bost, Al Tabor, John Rayment and Judith Proctor were still writing intelligent, incisive PBM reviews: JJ Clink was still wearing an anorak and playing (and reviewing) complicated PBM games, while John Dent enlightened and entertained us all with graphic descriptions of what his latest, long-legged, big-busted, voluptuous female character was up to in a hand-moderated game.

In the RPG world, Joe Dever worked in a role-playing shop in Tottenham Court Road, London, W1 with various other people who were destined to make it big in the role-playing world: **Dungeons and Dragons** rulebooks were A5 in size, miniature pure-lead figures cost 20p each while war gamers were decrying the fact that E Gary Gygax's new D&D game was the end of the war-gaming hobby as they knew it.

Back in PBM land Mo Holkar was playing evil, back stabbing characters in **Saturnalia**; Nick Palmer MP was plain Nicky Palmer, the man who surely must have been slowly killing himself writing anything up to four reviews an issue for *Flagship*: the Shulkinds (Phil and Dee) kept the hobby on its toes with outspoken opinion and unflinching criticism, while Bob Middleton was running **Keys of Medoch**. **Midgard** was the 'in' PBM game to play, being dominated by the fiendishly clever and ultimate diplomat, Alan 'The Getham' Crump, while John 'The Banner' Dent was secretly playing The Cult of The Dark One and stitching up all and sundry, especially his best mate!

In the meantime, Hilary Hayes and Ashley Perryman were writing challenging PBM reviews and enjoyable letters to Flagship. In these heady times, PBM pub-meets grew and flourished eventually turning into bi-annual PBM conventions in both London and Sheffield organised by the BPBMA. These were the times when John Woodall, Ken Borer and Ken Mulholland were still with us, each impacting with PBM hobby in his own inimitable and individual way, with discussion/disagreement being an enjoyable, not-to-say thought-provoking, part of the hobby.

At this time *White Dwarf* was a roleplaying magazine, covering such up and coming games as **Traveller**, **Rune-Quest** and **Call of Cuthulu**. Indeed at this time two young firebrands were shaking up the RPG market - one Greg Stafford and Steve Jackson (US version). Here Don Turnbull and Marcus L Rowland were expanding on new roleplaying rules and roles, and rumours were rife that a new 'Advanced' form of Dungeons

and Dragons was soon to be forthcoming.

RPG 'Meets' were all the rage at this time, with the biggest and baddest meet of all being 'Dragonmeet' at the Horticultural Hall, just off Victoria, London W1. Everyone went, played loads of games, chatted and got blind drunk. Friendships were made, games discussed and gaming groups formed. The place was packed and some companies made a killing - so much so that at one late 80s Games Workshop-organised con, some young spirited blond-haired punk-rocker managed to make his way to the microphone, as everyone was being forced to leave, and made the now-legendary announcement 'We've got your money now f**k off home!!!'

PBM, never a backwards organisation, soon made use of these RPG-meets. They went along, advertised their wares and attracted a new audience. Soon individual companies were having their own meets - Sat-meets (**Saturnalia**) Crasi-meets (**Crasimoff's World**) and Hunt-meets (**The Hunting**). These meets introduced us (in the flesh) to such PBM luminaries as Kevin Cropper, Nigel Mitchell, Andy Smith (Crasimoff's World): Neil Packer, Simon Letts (Saturnalia) and Dave Cooksey (The Hunting). Legendary days passed - Kevin Cropper smashing a full beer can over his head in tune with Gary Glitter's *Rock and Roll: Part II*, John Woodall's drop kick to a parking meter, low punch to the slot machine and reverse peristalsis into a pint glass, managing to fill it completely to the brim with vomit; the four-hour version of the **Mad** boardgame played by 24 people, where everyone sat in a marquis at Blackpool beach one cold, November Saturday with their shirts off and their pants on their head! These images go on ...

There were times when Alan Crump, a man of letters, enlightened us with his view of the PBM world, and challenged our preconceptions of the hobby. Fanzines (*Totally Zane* and *Start-up and Two Free Turns*) had massive circulations and Martin Webb and Peter Thornhill were regular, entertaining and humorous contributors to *Flagship*, bringing us their enjoyable view on current games.

Then the pace of my time travel speeded up: various old and defunct periodicals flew by: *The Adventurer*, *Fantasy Chronicles*, *Imagine*, *Gamesman*, *The Last Province*, *Games Master* and *Games Master International* and then with a mental bang I was brought back to the current time-line, the current version of Flagship laying closed and limp in my hand.

Five hours had gone by, an untidy mountainous-range of old magazines was strewn across the floor and my shelves were still as sturdy and as upright as ever. That will teach me to sit down and read piles of old magazines instead of getting on with the job at hand. Mind you it was good fun and brought back great memories of games, people, places and events from times gone by. I must remember to get into my paper time machine and fly back to the past more often!

The Next Generation

JOHN HARRINGTON suggests zines for teens...

YESTERDAY my son officially became a teenager. In some cultures they mark the passage to manhood with a ritual celebration but I don't think my wife would agree to dumping him alone in the forest and telling him not to come home until he had killed a wild animal with his bare hands, so instead I let him play Texas Hold 'Em Poker at the recent ManorCon games convention in Birmingham - with my money....

He rewarded my faith by winning the tournament and £100, beating seven players among whom numbered one who bought his first house out of his poker winnings, another who won a medal in poker at the Mind Sports Olympiad and another who plays poker online virtually (geddit?) every day and whose holiday each year consists of a two week stay in Las Vegas - and he doesn't go there to see Engelbert Humperdinck.

All of which made me realise that it is often a mistake to underestimate the abilities of juveniles; there's no reason why they should not be able to handle the complexities of PBM games but possibly they need a gentle (and inexpensive) introduction, in which case the zine scene is the perfect place for them. Below is a list of games I consider likely to be suitable games for the next generation of gamers to play, mainly because they are simple but have a lot of atmosphere.

Dungeon delving

Mystic Wood and **Sorcerer's Cave**: These companion games both use the 'discover the map as you go along' system as a band of adventurers explore the area, encounter fantastical creatures whom they either recruit or fight, and try to exit with the biggest bag of swag. The game lacks interaction but could easily be played by kids as young as 9 or 10.

Talisman: Inexplicably popular Games Workshop game in which fantasy characters (barbarian, dwarf - the usual suspects) wander around three circuits of the board Monopoly style, bashing up monsters, gaining magical artefacts until they feel strong enough to head for the centre of the board to battle for the Crown of Command. Not enough player interaction for my liking but lots of people thoroughly enjoy this.

Dungeonquest: The name says it all really. Heavily luck dependent but a lot of younger players seem to like that. Like Sorcerer's Cave it uses a tile system to build a different dungeon each time.

Fighting

Wizard's Quest: Risk! with orcs. Rival warlords on an island pit armies against each other. In my experience teenaged boys love these fairly simplistic 'move a pile of units to the province next door and roll dice for 10 minutes' games and so do many adults; Wizard's Quest is low enough in complexity for a relatively inexperienced player to do well.

Swashbuckler: A game which seeks to recreate the fight scenes seen in the films of Douglas Fairbanks or Errol Flynn or any of the Musketeers films. Each turn you have to programme your character to perform a number of tasks such as swinging from the chandeliers, pulling the rug out from under the feet of an opponent or the more prosaic smashing a bottle over the head of a rival.

Circus Maximus: Sticking with the movie theme, this is Ben Hur with slightly more violence! Ostensibly a race game it almost invariably starts off with the armed-to-the-teeth chariots trying to cripple the nancy-boy fast chariots before they can pull out of range. Bad news for the fast boys... it's a three lap race and the heavy boys will be waiting on a laps two and three for another crack at the fast chariots. Sadly, a fast chariot almost always wins but as each player has two chariots players usually have one heavy and one light chariot.

Sopwith: World War One dog-fight game. Like most good games the rules are simple but the interaction between the players makes the decision-making anything but trivial. Pilots only move three hexes per turn (ahead, left, right, slide left or slide right) and can only shoot ahead, left or right but that leaves a lot of scope for bluff and double-bluff.

Snowball Fighting: Somewhat similar to Sopwith in that each player performs three actions per turn but in this case the actions involve different types of snowball, each with its own 'probability to hit' ratio. Who can resist a game which features an attack called 'Shed Avalanche'?

Maneater: Not sure if this really qualifies as a fighting game: most of the fighting is done by the player controlling the shark, while the humans simply try to make it to shore with at least one limb remaining. Somehow the theme seems more off colour than, say, charioteers lashing whips in each other's faces, but when did kids ever worry about bad taste? Besides, each player gets to be the shark once. Like Sopwith, a game of manoeuvre and guesswork but because it uses dice it is not as pure a design as Sopwith.

Science Fiction

RoboRally: Like Circus Maximus, a combat-cum-race game. In this case players control robots which try to negotiate their way through a factory consisting of obstacles such as turntables, conveyor belts, laser beams and other robots. I confess to being terrible at this game and I'm usually still on my starting square when the leaders are crossing the finishing line, but I can see the appeal, even though it gives me headache face-to-face.

Awful Green Things From Outer Space: If Chuck Jones had been the artistic director on *Alien*, this is what the result might have been. One player controls the crew of a spaceship as they try to stop the fast-breeding alien invaders from taking over the ship; the crew's major problem is they know nothing about the effects of their weapons on the awful green things until they use them - sometimes the results only make matters worse. The humans need to find an effective weapon early otherwise they are sunk but it's good fun all the same.

Where can I find these games?

Mystic Wood: *Flights of Fancy*, *For Whom The Die Rolls*
Sorcerer's Cave: *Obsidian*
Talisman: *Flights of Fancy*
Dungeonquest: *For Whom The Die Rolls*
Wizard's Quest: *Flights of Fancy*
Swashbuckler: *psychozine*
Circus Maximus: *Serendipity*
Sopwith: *Flights of Fancy*, *For Whom The Die Rolls*, *psychozine*, *Strangitude*
Snowball Fighting: *Obsidian*, *Variable Pig*
Maneater: *Flights of Fancy*, *Variable Pig*
RoboRally: *Variable Pig*
Awful Green Things: *Strangitude*, *Variable Pig*

Flights of Fancy, Philip Honeybone, 28 St. Michael's Road, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7HG.
For Whom The Die Rolls, Keith Thomasson, 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts. HP23 4NQ
    http://www.fwtwr.com
Psychozine, *http://www.psychozine.co.uk*
Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Road, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B73 1YL.
Serendipity, John Webley, Tapferreihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany
    http://www.smartgroups.com/groups/serendipityzine
Obsidian, Alex Richardson, 9 Bridge Street, Hitchin, Herts. SG5 2DE.
Variable Pig, Jim Reader, Wethouder Gerssenlaan 27, 3454BA De Meern, The Netherlands
    http://www.sholing.force9.co.uk/

On Screen

Mega Opportunities

GLOBETROTTER looks ahead, and around ...

Multiplayer and The Future

As computer games continue to grow both in complexity and popularity it is only logical that the boundaries of technology are pushed. As the foundations of huge online societies continues to evolve and emerge, what will lie in store for the gamers? What new technology and gaming situations could we be looking forward to in the years to come?

Technology

Right now, only a small proportion of the gaming public has access to broadband internet connections. While the numbers will continue to advance in the years to come, until there's a huge majority of people using broadband it will not be able to be fully realized for gaming without disenfranchising a large majority of gamers.

Once broadband is as readily available as dial-up connections then the real fun will begin. Huge (100,000+) games will be able to come about. Real communities, with voting and a sense of local politics and inter-person interaction will evolve from the chaos present in our current MMORPGs. In addition to the huge number of players, these servers will be able to support full voice chat capabilities. Real time communication with no loss on performance. Some games are now starting to support this and will only grow in both size and scope as communications technologies continue to emerge and improve.

Tribes 2 experimented with an all-in-one interface. Email, forums, limited web browsing and chat tools built into the game itself. The next wave of games will incorporate these features and utilize them more efficiently and will really enhance the games for those players who choose to use them. As these games become more OS-like in their functionality players will feel more involved with the experience. Rather than fumble around with independent programs, it's easier to communicate with your clanmates through the in-game email and Instant Messaging capabilities, and that helps establish more coordinated games and more informed players. Coordinating a match becomes clicking on the email tab and sending mail from an automatically updated clan mailing list rather than being subjected to a tedious email collection and maintenance; and checking the mail becomes a simple task in game rather than manipulation of the OS itself. And when it comes to a meeting? Built-in voice chat interface outlined above. The clans of the future will be better organized and more prepared than even the most well maintained groups today.

Games

Let's move on to what is going to take advantage of these technological advances: the games themselves. Without them all these neat technologies would do nothing but rest in the hands of government and military. So let's take a look at the future of time wasters.

Since the average number of players will increase dramatically, straight up FPSes will be like small battles while games like **PlanetSide** and **EverQuest** will be like full-fledged wars. Imagine a sci-fi MMORPG first person shooter where one group is invading a planet; thousands of troops being delivered into battle by troop carriers; artillery units exchanging fire and moving ahead against the retreating forces; thousands of players fighting on both sides; generals giving orders to an air wing division or ordering infantry troops to hold their ground. Taking what we've experienced in war recreations and first person shooters to new heights of immersion. Or a fantasy EverQuest-esque game. Thousands of players spanning a massive planet, interacting and trading not only with each other on a small scale but with other player-run nations on an international or intergalactic level.

Imagine an Everquest with real local governments and consulars. Or a Star Wars Galaxies with a functional Galactic Senate full of players who were elected by other players. This might sound a bit intimidating for casual players but no more than in real life. You don't have to have an interest in politics and laws to be affected by them. And if someone has the desire and want they can fight the system and try to make a change. Communities could decide the effects of game patches and game balance, since they generally have a better understanding of how the mechanics of the game work than the developers. Who better to decide on the effects of changes to the game than the people who play the games to begin with? Imagine a political simulator... SimPolitics if you will, where a fully functioning central government is established and controlled by player characters, which itself controls the military operations I've described above. Keeping the micro management as little as possible, to be most effective (we don't want to mimic real life too perfectly). Or what about a totally freeform game, where an entire town or state or nation is created and filled with people and places and items, and it's up to the player to decide what they want to do? Join a street gang and start a war with a rival gang; find a job and begin your rise to the top, including selling secrets to the competition; joining the military and taking part in military conflicts; becoming a reporter and reporting on said military action; the possibilities for games utilizing methods similar to these are something of another article in and of itself but the potential is present.

Something is clear however. Cooperation, working with others in any and every capacity is going to have to be present. Much like how real societies depend on the contributions of their inhabitants, our cyber societies are going to require the same interaction. If too many players don't care the cities will become rundown slums, or the military units will be poorly trained and equipped. Or the system will be filled with corruption. If the players don't have an interest in keeping things working properly, it could turn into little more than a very accurate simulation of life in a lot of cases.

Granted it would take a lot of development time and a very talented team to create the technologies and games described above. But it will happen. Whether it's a large established game company, or a small band of renegade coders with a business contract someone will take the plunge and bring us the next step in online gaming interaction. And when it happens, whether people realise it or not, it will change of the face of gaming unlike anything people have ever seen before.

NEW RELEASES
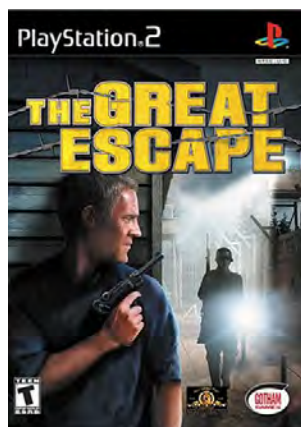
The Great Escape

Publisher: *Gotham Games*
Plaform: *PlayStation 2*, *X-Box* and *PC*.
Web: *www.gothamgames.com/games/ greatescape*

'All the action and excitement of the great film is coming to a console near you in The Great Escape'. Or that's what the marketing men would have you believe. Game tie-ins with films are of course a lucrative way of making some money from a dodgy film, though in this case it's the film that is the classic while the game is, well, another piece of marketing fluff really. The game expands on the plot of the movie, giving you the ability to play as Steve McQueen's character, Capt Virgil Hilts, or you can take control of other characters from the game to further the story. The background is a rather weak story of the events leading up to the movie, in which a group of Allied prisoners stage an escape from a German POW camp in World War II. Save your money and buy the film on DVD.

Escape Velocity Nova

Publisher: *Ambrosia Software*
Platform: *PC*
Web: *www.ambrosiasw.com/games/evn/*

The third incarnation of the Escape Velocity series finds you as a young pilot with a brand-new shuttlecraft, full power cells, and an entire universe to explore. You must choose which missions to take, which people to trust and which gear to buy. Will a rack of solar panels be more useful than a shiny new laser turret? Which ship has the best layout for your playing style? You can choose from literally hundreds of ships and upgrades in your journeys. I have to say that the high quality graphics and transparency effects of the new EV Nova engine are a dramatic improvement over previous versions, while the ambitious story presents you with a myriad of choices that promises extensive replayability. Interestingly the game also offers a feature whereby players can install or create additional plugins to enhance gameplay or introduce entirely new stories. Hmmm, possibilities here ...

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

Publisher: *EIDOS Interactive*
Platforms: *PC, PS2*
Web: *www.tombraider.com/*

A series of grisly murders brings Lara into conflict with a sinister Alchemist from the past, and a secret alliance of powerful individuals shrouded in mystery. At the centre of these mysteries are five 14th century paintings - the Obscura Paintings - which the Alchemist is desperate to repossess. Accused of the murder of her one time mentor, Von Croy, Lara becomes a fugitive on the run. Pursued by the police, she follows the Alchemist into a dark world of blood, betrayal and vengeance. It is up to her to defeat this unholy alliance and stop them from unleashing their incredible powers on the world. Action, explosions, scanty clothing and an even scantier plot: for aficionados only.

Titans of Steel Warring Suns

Publisher: *Matrix Games*
Platform: *PC*
Web: *www.matrixgames.com/games/TitansofSteel2/features.asp*

The Titans of Steel: Warring Sun universe is a future where the main fighting unit is the Titan Attack Tech, better know as the Titan-AT. Titan-Ats are generally humanoid in appearance, range from seven to fifteen meters in height and weigh as much as 200 tons. I like the scope of this game: it's more than a combat game, it actually makes a fair stab at being a fully open-ended roleplaying system, replete with eight different races, a full statistics sheet for each pilot, experience points and other roleplaying paraphernalia.

Star Wars Galaxies

Publisher: *Verant Interactive & Sony Online Entertainment* Platforms: *PS2 & PC*
Web: *http:// starwarsgalaxies.station.sony.com/*
Cost: *US price set at $49.99 plus $14.99 per month (discounts available for longer periods). I'm not sure about the UK monthly charges, but Amazon are offering pre-ordered copies of the software for £26.99.*

To be released in Europe at the end of December this year, SWG is set to be the next big thing in the MMORPG genre. Set against the backdrop of civil war in the Star Wars universe, the game offers a choice of species and character types before plunging you into the online gaming experience with (almost certainly) thousands of other adventurers. All the Star Wars universe is detailed, with some very nice graphics for adventuring both on and off planet. In common with most games of this genre, SWG is online only and requires an Internet connection; the first 30 days' play is free, but a monthly fee, payable by credit card, is charged thereafter.

The Politics of Gaming

LISA FORDHAM raises some controversial issues ...

A SHORT TIME ago, a friend suggested that I write an article discussing such controversial topics as killing as an aspect of roleplaying games, playing evil (amoral?) vs good characters, how some religious personalities condemn all roleplaying as satanic and evil, and anything else I could think of.

Naively not expecting a lot of controversy I posted on a couple of roleplaying forums and I was surprised at how strong the feelings were on many of these issues. Whereas some were able to discuss this topic calmly and thoughtfully, you could almost hear the steam coming out of someone's ears from some posts. For example when I asked them about player killing:

'I personally feel that most games, with the exception of Paranoia, are designed to be run as a co-operative effort and try to design characters that will be able to function in a group. Some of the other players feel that this restrictive; I think that it is merely common sense.'

There were others who felt differently however:

'I have to disagree. It has not happened in a game I have participated in but it very nearly has. If a PC has done something that would cause another PC to kill her if the character was an NPC then it is in character and appropriate.'

And of course there are people whose opinions are not strongly on either side.

'I will not have a player character die just because the dice came out unfortunate; except in such cases when the potential lethality of a given action was made clear beforehand and other options were available. I will however kill PCs in the blink of an eye when stupidity is involved....In a nutshell, if the player isn't ok with character death I wouldn't do it; but my players know what can happen to them if they do very stupid things.'

I feel it my responsibility to generate more discussion and find out what others (that's you) think. To be fair I wasn't sure how I felt about character killing. As a GM, I try to warn my PCs that something is not a very good idea. (Please note the understatement of that sentence.) If I do this multiple times and they still insist on it, then they may not make it past the scenario. But, unless it's something egregious or a sacrifice to save the world, I try to avoid it as much as possible (even if the dice say otherwise).

As a player, I feel very differently. I know that you want to play in character. And in some (rare) cases it may even push the story further to have internal conflict. However, I have also found that it upsets the group as a whole when you really are not sure you can trust your own group. As I said, sometimes the characters are in such a situation it can't be helped and a GM's task is to try to defuse it before it happens. However, I would be much more able to work with a group if I know that they are all going to watch my back, or at least not stab me in the back.

This does not mean that I disapprove of having a character in the group working for the GM, and the group as a whole has to find the 'traitor'. Situations along these lines can be set up which can be both a lot of fun and very challenging. But it should not be a constant and recurrent happening or the group will never get to be a cohesive unit.

I can hear you asking 'How do you feel?' In a nutshell I can say that sometimes it's necessary but should be avoided whenever and wherever possible.

There are many other controversial issues involved in playing evil characters as opposed the more usual goody-goody types. As another correspondent said,

'Before I go any further I would just like to state that I don't believe in assigning an "Alignment" to a character. I don't think that any world, even a fantasy one, is that black and white. I believe that a character should be able to act any way they wish as long as they are willing to live with the consequences of their actions... the tendency of a lot of players to play their characters this way. Where's the "Role-Playing"? There isn't much of a challenge in playing a character this way. He is purposeless. Munchkin Alert! Munchkin Alert!'

As far as I am concerned, although a character should feel comfortable choosing whatever he wants to play, if you have a group of one type and a single player choosing the other, there can be a lot of 'discussion' among the group.

I see nothing wrong with playing an evil group, but you should keep in mind that even evil characters have a code they must follow. If the group is doing what they want and everyone is having fun, have fun... Better in a game than actually committing acts such as these.

Which leads us to my final controversy of this particular article. Religious intolerance. There are those out there who truly believe roleplaying introduces people to witchcraft, satanism and a life of amorality. Obviously, as I consider myself to be a good, moral individual I do not hold these views. When I play a magic user, for instance, I don't go and do actual spells and (not even in character) do I sacrifice anyone. I know how frustrating it can be for people to judge something when they haven't even taken the time to see what it really is.

However, if we are asking them to be tolerant and actually listen to us and see what roleplaying is about, we have to stop being derisive to them as well. If we want to be heard, we have to be willing to listen.

There are so many other issues that this article can go on forever. The three issues I raised in this article all have a common element, taking the other players' point of view into consideration. Sometimes, unfortunately, I feel that's where a lot of us fall short.

The Globalisation of PBM

SAM ROADS of Harlequin Games praises the digital revolution ...

RICK LOOMIS, owner of the PBM firm *Flying Buffalo Inc*, believes that he holds the record as the first person to ever purchase a computer specifically for gaming. (Rick also holds the record as the first person to ever have to deal with an angry player complaining about an input error. But that's another story.)

In the decades of PBM gaming that have passed since that day, the computer and the internet have completely changed the way that most PBMs are played. Gone are the days of spreading photocopied sheets across your student flat, and sellotaping them together to make a map of the planet (which also doubled as a handy eiderdown). Gone too the 3"x5" internal mail cards and, worst of all, gone the thump of turn hitting doormat after the postie has finally decided to let you have your turn.

It's no surprise that during the 90s, many players and referees campaigned noisily to make sure that the Borg email collective didn't assimilate their paper-based starships.

However, some folk, lone voices against the pro-paper lobby, could see that the future was digital, and quietly made their preparations. They began to redesign their games to enable them to accept email submission, but were careful not to let slip rumours of their machinations, for fear of public pillorying by those players who had read *Fahrenheit451*.

By the new millennium, email was ubiquitous, and everyone had a good laugh about what Luddite silly-billys they'd been. Even Flagship changed its hugely successful Galactic View format to specifically permit PBeM games their own space. The email emancipation was complete.

But how did any of this affect the PBM firms?

Traditionally, PBM firms had plied their trade within national boundaries, following tribal laws established in antiquity. Players had only been able to contact their referees through the recent discovery of telephone technology. And, not wishing to awaken an overseas gaming deity at four in the morning for a transcontinental discussion of the merits of the P17 order, they had settled for home-grown gaming.

Naturally the firms grew as large as they could given their catchment area and the quality of their postal service. This lead to a large number of healthy British firms, several large US and Australian firms, a few non-English firms, and no Vatican City firms.

The number of workers in the PBM sector earning more than a papergirl remained strictly single figures, but who cared when everyone was having such fun?

Well... actually everyone cared. To the astonishment of all, firm after firm stopped trading. Some referees cited personal reasons and apologised to their distraught players. Others got a proper job and sold their games on to any player with more money than sense. A few kind souls even racked up huge credit-card charges, and ran off to countries with no extradition treaties, bless them.

Many players got religion, committed suicide, or even changed banks, when they heard that Shadowblack

Darkstorm would never gain stats again.

Of course this failure of confidence meant that players left the hobby, or at least, played with a very careful eye on their balance. This led to even poorer moderators, which led to worse service, which led to poorer moderators, which led to...

Some canny firms, however, managed to weather the storm. One blanked out any mention of the rest of the PBM industry from everything their players ever read, thus ensuring their customer loyalty. Another hit on the excellent idea of awarding game victory to the player who spent the most real-world money. And another used the word 'wacky' enough times to convince the players that they really were having a lot of fun.

But then... Around the turn of the millennium, something strange started to happen. The PBM firms realised that they could stretch their wings and fly across the world, gathering players from any country which spoke the same language. First one, then another, then finally perhaps as many as three firms spread their megacorporeal tentacles across the world to homogenise PBM as we know it. The future was here. The future was megacorporeal.

Human civilisation is better than hamster civilisation

You may think that's a bold claim, but whilst they've only learned how to gnaw nuts, run in a wheel and climb small tubes backwards, we've built spaceships, written operas and designed remote-controls with an eject button. We pulled off these feats through job specialisation and a social infrastructure that rodents can only dream of. Though they probably don't.

In the Nineties, the biggest and best PBM games were licensed around the world, each country having its own licensee. Each of these did all the things which PBM firms have to do, including Accounting, Marketing, Design, Moderation, Public Relations, Editing, Art, Development, Proof-reading, Coding, Book-keeping, IT, Money-raising, Play-testing, Networking, Hardware support, Lawyering, Mailroom Duties and, most importantly, Tea Making.

Learning these skills took time and, inevitably, not all PBM firms were able to excel at every field. But as Jools Holland is fond of saying in a particularly annoying UK advert for cheap whiskey, put them all together and something special happens. And as PBM companies went global, however, there was no longer a need for a licensee for every country. And where previously there was a handful of individual licensees catering to their local players, you now found a single entity, with a head office in one country and frontier outposts spread across the remainder of the globe.

Initially the players were aghast. Their treasured home-spun, local, home-town, traditional, salt-of-the-earth, still-does-things-on-386s PBM firm had been swallowed up by a hegemonic, culture-stifling, multinational, assimilating, Ronald MacDonald-loving UberCorp. However, with each passing turn they discovered a startlingly startling discovery - it was better this way!

They got better service. They got code updates more often than once every eclipse of the sun. They got a PBM firm which wasn't about to fold. And perhaps most importantly of all, they got a firm with a bigger budget for advertising in leading PBM journals...

(Sam is the evil globalising genius behind Harlequin Games. Sam cannot climb small tubes backwards.)
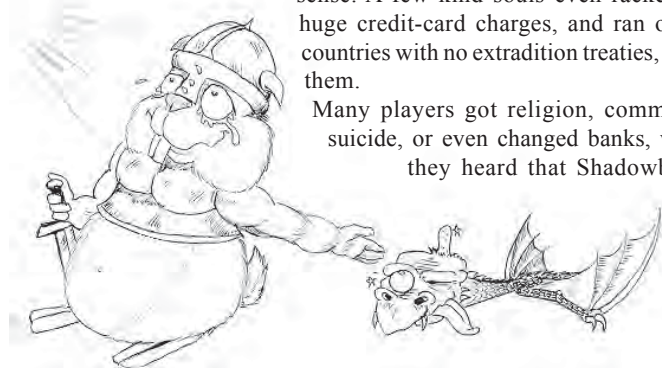
Games Nominated at Spiel

PEVANS' personal view of last year's best European Boardgames ...

It was rather disconcerting to look through the list of nominees for this year's Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) and realise how few of them I've played. The jury's brief is focused more on family games than strategy games. However, the list of nominees is usually a good guide to the best European games of the last year. So here they are, with my comments.

The winner is **Alhambra**, designed by Dirk Henn and published by Queen Games (in Germany). It is a development of Henn's older, stock market game, **Stimmt So!**, also from Queen. The game has been well received, some rating it better than Stimmt So! and everybody extolling the production and artwork, which has an Arabian (Moorish?) theme. In turn, players either pick up some money cards or use money cards to buy building tiles. The tiles are used to lay out a palace in front of each player. There are, of course, particular rules for how the tiles are laid and players score according to the values of the tiles they've played. Definitely worth trying.

Reiner Knizia's **Amun-Re** (published by Hans im Glück and Rio Grande Games) has already been reviewed in these pages (*Flagship 103*). It is my favourite of the nominees (remembering that I haven't played all of them!) and gets 9/10 on my highly subjective rating system.

Marcel-André Casasola-Merkle is the man behind **Attribut**, a card game published by Lookout Games. Players try to match the topic announced by one player with an attribute card from their hand. If they hold a green sheep, players with red sheep are looking to contradict. There's then a speed element to the game as players work out who's played the same way as them and grab their card. I won't be going out of my way to try this.

Ballon Cup (**Balloon Cup** in English from Rio Grande) is Stephen Glenn's first published game and part of Kosmos's range of two-player card games. The players win a number of cubes of a colour to gain the prize for that colour. There are four 'races' on the table, onto which 1-4 cubes are placed. Players take turns to play cards against a race, until the cards for both players match the cubes. Depending on which side is up, the race is won by the highest card total played or the lowest. First to get three prizes wins the game. It's a clever game that works well - though, annoyingly, some minor wrinkles didn't make it into the published rules. I give it 8/10.

Clans, like most of Leo Colovini's games, is highly abstract. Published by Winning Moves, the game is about getting groups of pieces together. Pieces start scattered over the board and any group can be moved to an adjacent space, provided there's at least one piece in it. Once a group is isolated, it scores points for each colour in the group. The player whose colour scores most points wins. The twist is that nobody knows who's got what colour - though you can often work it out. It's a clever little game, but not one I'm particularly taken with: 6/10.

Coloretto is a card game designed by Michael Schacht and published by Abacus Spiele. Another one I haven't played, but I understand it's a speed game (think **Racing Demon**). The idea is to slap down a sequence of colour cards. You collect some, but will be penalised if you have too many different colours at the end. Probably not my cup of tea.

Tom Schoeps is the designer of **Die Dracheninsel**, a treasure-hunting game published by Amigo. Players use cards to cross the circular island to retrieve the dragon's treasure. Two players must co-operate to get each treasure chest and split the loot - or fight over it. The winner is the player who gets the most gold back to their ship. Not one I've played, but it sounds interesting - though more of a family game, perhaps.

Edel, Stein und Reich comes from alea and Reinhard Staupe. It is a card game development of the designer's earlier **Basari**. By all accounts it's a cracker and is appreciated even by fans of the original. Players bid gems in order to get gems and cash. Remaining gems are cashed in at the end and the player with the most money wins. One I'm looking forward to trying.

I talked about the ingenious **Fische Fluppen Frikadellen** (2F Spiele) in my report from last year's Essen Spiel (*Flagship 100*). The aim of this game is to be the first to gain three 'fetishes' by trading other goods around the various shops on the board. Set-up is random, so the game is always different. Designer Friedemann Friese is as wacky as ever and includes rules for players to swap to a game being played on a different board (there are three versions of the game) during play. It still gets 9/10 from me.

Paris Paris is the second game from Michael Schacht and Abacus Spiele in the list. This one is a board game and Rio Grande is publishing an English edition. It is another highly abstract game. The board features a map of Paris, overlaid with a number of criss-crossing bus routes. Stops on the routes are drawn from a pool at random, giving players the opportunity to place markers at or near that point. Depending on conditions, a bus may then run a route, with points being scored by the players for markers on or near to that route. I know other people rate it highly, but it does my head in: 3/10.

As if that wasn't enough from Michael Schacht, we also have **Richelieu und die Königin!**, a two-player card game from Ravensburger. This pits the wife of Louis XIII against Cardinal Richelieu - reflecting a historical power struggle in 1630. It sounds quite straightforward. The cards are laid out, face-up, in four rows. In turn, each player takes one or two cards from the end of a row. The aim is to have the most cards in a colour and pick up several of those with symbols. This is another that I haven't played. I suspect it's meant for a family audience, but it's still one I'd like to try.

Murmel Spielwerkstatt is a Swiss outfit that has been around for some years with a selection of games with a green feel. **Rumis**, designed by Stefan Kögl, is a building game. Players place their blocks on top of each other's. The game finishes when the building reaches a certain height. Players score for their blocks that are visible from above, while unused pieces count against them. It's clearly highly abstract and I won't be going out of my way to play it.

Possibly the oddest game to see in this list is **Die Werwölfe von Düsterwald**, the German edition of **Les Loups-garous de Thiercelieux** from the French publisher, Asmodée, and credited to Philippe des Pallières and Hervé Marly. This is a proprietary version of the party game known as **Werewolf** or **Mafia**. Played in the right spirit (mine's vodka), this is great fun and easily worth 9/10. The published version provides some great props that help to organise things.

THE MIGHTY PEN

Back to Basics!

I thought more than once of ending my subscription due to the lack of PBM coverage for which the mag is meant to be. Please, more coverage of PBM!

Martin Taylor

[We do run all the PBM material we receive, and will never desert PBM. Unfortunately there have not been many new PBM releases over the past couple of years, and not all GMs support us, even for free publicity in the form of news and a listing in Galactic View.

We were faced with the choicee of shrinking down to zine size with a much less glossy appearance, or of expanding to include other types of game. We took the latter course as being the best way of ensuring the continuation of quality PBM coverage. We do not cut PBM coverage to make way for other types of game.

Remember too that Flagship is produced for fun and a love of gaming!]

War and Gaming

Three things make me comment on the points raised by Mark Hanson in issue 103.

1 - At the time of the Hungerford massacre I was a PBMer but also a firearms certificate holder owning a Smith and Wesson .357 magnum. As the reports began to link Michael Ryan with PBM I felt 'our' side of the case must be heard. I contacted the journalist who had been writing articles for The Sun. I made it clear what I was, what I own etc, and he was very interested. 'PBM is no different from chess' was my argument and amazingly he accepted this. But the whole situation made me review my own lifestyle. Could I do what Ryan had done? The honest truth is, if pushed and in the wrong circumstances, the answer was 'yes'. My handgun was sold and my excess ammunition handed in to the police. Later events at Dunblane confirmed my views.

2 - PBM games about war. Just before the first Gulf War there was a game advertising itself as having up-to-date maps of the region. You could fight the war before it occurred in real life. This in my opinion is just unacceptable. You can roleplay Alexander, Caesar and others of history. But I draw the line at wargames where people who lived through it may still be alive. It's my own feeling and I do not condemn anyone else who disagrees with this. But to run a wargame whilst the troops are massing on the borders is just sick. I decided to make my feelings known in the magazine PBM Scroll. That little cesspit of a game died its own death. Perhaps the gamemasters realised the potential trouble of 'Sun' reporters knocking on their doors?

3 - I am the player Carol mentioned who could not bring himself to launch an in-game missile attack on a city [just after September 11th]. You may find this stupid and over-sensitive. I do not care, and the GM accepted my dropout in an understanding way. Do I criticise those who played in that game? - of course not. Don't get me wrong, I am not fluffy white bunny as regards my roleplaying. I have played Moslem fanatics, a prostitute (bringing a whole new meaning to over-the-tabletop-gaming), a policeman who used rats for interrogation. I could easily play an SS

officer in charge of concentration camps. Would I join such a game? No!

Playing PBM games for over twenty years has taught me a lot. I have researched religion, military tactics, politics, and even the occult. It has, I believe, made me a better person with a more rounded view of world events.

At the time of writing the Iraq war has ended. The deaths will go on for many years, I suspect, and more extremist groups will surface. I will not, even with my in-depth knowledge, play any game connected with this subject.

Les Jones

Nice article last issue about war and games. Long ago, when we started with CSPP, there was a similar decision. It's easier (here in Germany) to publish fantasy or science fiction games as in the rules it is declared that these are fictional games. Real wargames here in Germany always have ethical problems and may be indexed for young people so that you lose a quarter of your possible customership.

Ethics in games is another theme. For myself, I prefer playing Settlers, Railroad Tycoon and Steel Panthers, the last one only in my personal room as my girl didn't understand it. Boardgames with several players are more the Ancients or perhaps up to the Civil War (wooden block games); WW1 and WW2 are almost out because as teacher you are discussing with the pupils rather than playing real wargames.

Maybe that principle is a bit strange - Ancients games are more like duels, and both involve the risk of being hurt. Modern warfare is more of an anonymous thing, where artillery or bombs don't distinguish between soldiers and civilians. Nevertheless, in Civil War games anywhere (old Germany, France, Atlanta to name only some), the civilians are always harmed.

I think any player has to define and know his own boundaries.

Harald Topf (CSPP, Germany)

Publicising PBM

Middle Earth PBM Games in conjunction with Flying Buffalo, Reality Simulations and Harlequin Games are inviting other PBM firms to join them in an attempt to raise the public profile of Play by (e)Mail games.

We have various plans, including raising player's awareness in Origins, a 12-month set of ads in gaming magazines, with articles and reviews, on-line reviews and much, much more.

Any firm that would like to be a part of this please get in touch for more details although I would love to see a debate on what we can do here.

Clint Oldridge (Middle Earth PBM Games)

[We'll support these efforts! Anyone with further ideas is invited both to contact Clint at me@middleearthgames.com and to write to Flagship.]

Dungeons and Dragons

Some years around 1984/85 **Dungeons & Dragons** started. I remember it, as I was at school, but never tried it, and I'm wondering if it is still going and if so, is there anyone near me who can help me try it. Are there any clubs around?

T Tempesta

[You should be able to find D&D fans near you. Perhaps if you ask in a local games shop? Can any readers help? - Ed.

Readers looking for a local RPG club might want to take a look at www.sfcp.co.uk/Clubs/ This may be a little out of date, but is fairly comprehensive nonetheless. Your best bet would be to ask at your local games shop (if you are still lucky enough to have such a thing). - Assist. Ed.]

Kids in PBM

I have no real objections to this in general. My first feeling is that it would place a serious responsibility on gamemaster/companies. What would be the lowest age allowed? Would games recieve a 'rating', as with films? Who sets the ratings? How would 'grooming' of young players be prevented? 'I wasn't grooming them, I was only role-playing!'

In recent months we have had discussions about allowing prisoners to play games. Who is going to explain why a 12year-old has been

communicating with a prisoner? What is the prisoner in for? Will he require Home Office permission to play? How could the GM know that it was 100% safe for children to play in his game? Oh yes! Do not forget the parents in this case. You will need their permission for their child to play. Are you GMs ready to face an angry parent?

As for Kieron Redman himself, he admits that he 'wormed his way into an adult world.' Hey, that's what young people do. He is one of the 99.9% who play safely, but let's hope that in the future we do not read headlines such as 'girl raped after meeting man she met through pbm game'. Could not happen!... 'PBM freak Michael Ryan guns down people in game inspired blood lust.' We all know that was not true! But the damage was done. The right to run and play games is yours, but so is the responsibility!

I have only mentioned PBM. PBeM is a whole new ball game. One thing to be playing against an unkown nutter the other side of the world. But email allows them instant access to you day or night. Hacking of personal details not only gaming ones!

Les Jones

[Flagship would be very interested in your views on this controversial topic. Personally I'm not in complete agreement with this letter, but let's see what you think ...]

Bob McLain Protests

I'm not really clear about this, even though I read Chris Harvey's letter to the editor several times, but I believe he thinks that I took a personal swipe at him by suggesting that Starweb should not win any more Origins awards. Chris did postbox the game in England years ago. But I don't know Chris, apart from one letter he sent me in 1983, and until now, I hadn't thought about him, although I did like his article in issue 102.

I'm not complaining about Starweb; I'm complaining about the policy of allowing the same game to win the same award multiple times. One movie, one Academy Award. One book, one Pulitzer Prize. So why one game, more than one Origins Award?

Is that better, Chris? Friends? Good. By the way, Mr Foster says you still owe him a quid...

Bob McLain

[Hmm, I'm not sure that a PBM game really compares with a book or a film... The Origins Award is not for the best new *game after all, and a good game can surely remain a good game even several years after it was first released?]*

Warning All Moderators

If your 'significant other' is playing in a game you run, for the sake of continued matrimonial harmony, do not go and change the gender of their favourite character. Any humour generated in the short term is far outweighed by the long term grief and ear-bashing that will follow!

Antony Dunks

To game or not to game? Time is the question

Although there are many who would love to game, they all have the same obstacle - Time!

One of the reasons PBEMs, computer RPGs, and other online games are so popular is because people aren't available to meet every week or even every other week for regular roleplaying sessions. These other systems at least fill the gaming need. However, there is nothing that can quite compare to a face to face game.

The question that needs answering is how to remedy the situation. Can we manufacture time in a busy schedule to allow us to partake in this (*very*) time-consuming hobby? For the most part, we know the answer. There are responsibilities and ties that will probably not allow us to game as much as we would like. But, perhaps we can game more than we do now.

Everyone needs a break from whatever it is they are doing, whether it's working overtime, taking care of children, or any of a number of different tasks. Let's take an example: Imagine a couple who love to game, but because they have a young child they really haven't had the time to meet with their group on a regular basis. But, this scenario may be easy to fix. If the child is very young, the parents can arrange to have

a play date with another child or children allowing them to get together for a few hours with their friends. They may even be able to arrange an overnight in which case a night of gaming is possible. Or, they could have friends over while the child is doing his/her own thing with friends in the house or even by him/herself. Alternatively, if the child is old enough and is interested, maybe they could include him/her in the session. It is a great way to spend time together and a wonderful bonding experience.

Let's take a different scenario: You work full-time, and with all your other responsibilities, you just haven't had the time to even get together with your friends. We all know what this is like. Working overtime doesn't allow us enough time to do errands, let alone time off to get together with friends. What is needed is the ability to plan. Set aside a day or two a month to get together with your friends for a few hours. Try to get as many errands as possible done during your lunch break to allow these days to come to pass. While this may not be the perfect answer at least you can get some, albeit a very small amount, of gaming time.

Part of the problem may be scheduling of time. Perhaps you have been able to arrange for appropriate time, but some of the others in your group have not been so lucky. How do you work this out? This is what takes such careful planning. You need to co-ordinate with others, make alternate plans, arrange for some people to cover for others to allow the time for everyone to get together. It's not as simple as it sounds.

Perhaps not everyone lives in the same area. Can everyone afford to travel? Maybe there is somewhere in the middle of all locations that people can get to easily. If this is important to you, you make the necessary adjustments and planning to make it happen.

There may be some times when you cannot work this into your schedule: that cannot be helped. But, everyone needs to allow him/herself the time to do what he/she enjoys, even if it means adjusting your schedule and making sure you fit that time in.

I realise this doesn't answer every question. There may not be a way to work out more than just getting together every once in a while.

Perhaps that is the best thing that PBEMs, computer and other type games are for, to fill in for those times you cannot do the preferred. In other words, you spend some time writing a move in your favourite PBEM or take a break with a riveting computer RPG while you adjust your schedule so that you can partake in some face to face gaming. Maybe not as often as you like, but once a month is better than none at all.
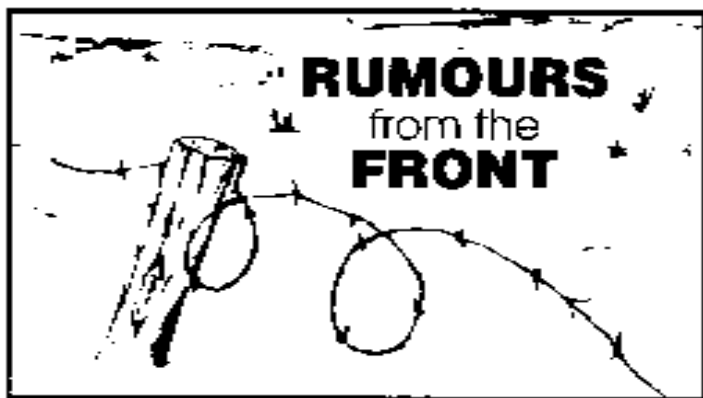
Ben Williams

[This column attempts to simulate a crowded bar full of players swapping experiences. It contains readers' uncensored comments, with no attempt to maintain fairness and balance; editing is only done for grammar, clarity, brevity and (occasionally) libel avoidance! In general, it's unwise to put too much weight on a single report, whether rave or curse. Readers are asked only to comment on games of which they have recent personal experience and to mention specifically if they are only giving a first impression. Unattributed comments, usually in [], are by the editor.]

Comments received from July 1st

Mike Absolom, Antony Dunks, Michael Grant, Alex Harris, Martin Helsdon, Chris Morris, Carol Mulholland, Robin Orman, Nasos Chabipis, Nikola Kasherov, Neil McCann, Panayotis Mavridis, Paul Moreno, Frank Werner, Costas Xiroyannis

PLAY BY MAIL / PLAY BY EMAIL
Aspects of Might
Robin Orman - 'Still resting comfortably on the fence with this game, while I enjoy the free single-character position. I may eventually upgrade to a full position with a few more characters, when I find the time - although I still think the game is a bit over-priced.'

Assyria's End (Agema Publications)
Chris Morris - 'The game is building up to a climax with the Egyptians and Judeans revolting at one end of the Empire, the Babylonians revolting at the other end, and the Assyrians just plain revolting everywhere. The irony is, I don't think the Egyptians meant to revolt - well, not just then - events just got out of hand. Very realistic. Of course, this is a game that can run and run. It's currently about 620BC and the greeks don't figure in strength for another 150 years or so.'

Barbarians at the Gate (Software Simulations)
Chris Morris - 'Completely lacks the Roman flavour. The Fall of Rome was an asymmetric situation - Rome didn't work the same way as the barbarians - but this game isn't. It's adapted from a Dark Ages scenario where players were roughly equal in size and their realms worked in a fairly similar way. There are differences, certainly, but not enough. Eg one order I've used a lot as a german barbarian is "tax" (when any rational tax inspector gave Germanic barbarians a wide berth unless he wanted his umbrella to end up where the rain doesn't fall). Or the discovery that the Irish/Scots are raising heavy cavalry - they should fir well in their curraghs.

Game report: Players of the German positions seem to be decimated by Hun/Roman attack or dropout. If turns are not submitted on time, a game routine takes over to devise some actions - a good idea for dropouts, not such good news for late turns (alliances can suffer if the machine attacks an ally on your behalf). Moral, post early for the sack of Rome.'

DungeonWorld (MadHouse)
Michael Grant - 'My Dwarven warrior is now extremely well armed after the cursed ring deal was done with his new guild. Steel gauntlets+3 and a ring of protection+10 and full plate armour now keep him extremely safe from harm. Didn't realise just how much this armour type hampers movement. 10 to 7 in one fell swoop. At least it's leaving me with plenty of orders spare for strength training. The guild offered several choices on where to go next to meet with fellow members but Axehand's a bit of a loner so will follow his own path safe in the knowledge that he can always get back to base using a teleport home scroll.'

DungeonWorld - BrokenLands (MadHouse)
Michael Grant - 'Just wish that Mermidon would stop using me as target practice when there are far better targets around. Look there's a bard right nearby singing about love, peace and happiness slightly off key. Can't you shoot him instead and do us all a favour? *LOL* Finally found a trader to relieve my backpack of junk (I mean valuable artefacts of course dear trader ;-). I've traded in the trusty old catapult for

a short bow. Don't know if this was a wise decision as I was just getting good with it. Felt more like a kid using it. Brother Cadfael the monk is still with me. Trying to keep me out of harms way. Still no wrinkles or other signs of aging upon his youthful face but I'm patiently watching and waiting.

Another of my undead summonings has faded away to nothingness. They don't seem to make skeletons and zombies like they used to. Eh, master! Landra Nightwarden (Human Female Necromancer)'

Robin Orman - 'Having climbed no fewer than three "Stairwells to the Surface", Gaelan is beginning to feel a little put out. However, a large cave entrance has been sighted ahead, which may finally be the exit to the surface!

Now we just have to deal with the Dragon in the way...'

DungeonWorld - Frontier (MadHouse)
Michael Grant - '"You catch me on a grim day indeed for we are surrounded by eight of the unfleshed ones. Adventurers' numbers in the old imperial palace have grown but the odds are still not good. Some may not live to see the dawn. My heart is heavy with the thoughts I may not see my friends again -
Anakine Oakhart (Nature Girl to her tribal friends)."
OOC - This is definitely my favourite DW game. The setting reminds me of the old Tarzan movies I loved so much as a child. The players have drawn together to help one another survive. Realising how many have been lost while wandering around alone. This place is extremely dangerous for the lone-wolf type.'

DungeonWorld - Kyr (MadHouse)
Michael Grant - 'Now that my Dervish, Al-Qatil, and Kyr Aslani Monk, Imad al-Din, are equipped for survival in this desert land it is time for them to test their mettle. No battles have been fought yet, no treasure discovered or maidens saved but this should be changing very soon as they've just entered a local dungeon named the Stair Case Of Khaz Ku. Glad to be out of the overcrowded city.

Einstein's Lot (Ulaidh Games)
Carol Mulholland - 'No deadlines for this game, which has helped while I've been travelling away. My character's discovered a corpse which could be that of her mentor (drat!), though it's a bit hard to be sure because he's been blasted by a sawn-off shotgun. At least the police seem to have accepted her innocence. They're interested to find out whether she knows anything about drug-dealing, ulp, but they don't mention the vampires or spectral snakes which are a bit more relevant to her experiences so far...'

Galaxy (Rebus Games)
Antony Dunks - 'Straight out of the playtest and into a "paying for it" game. I decided not to go for an Economic Victory this time, but to fight my way to the top of the table and have begun well, bombing two colonies in the first few turns. I have no idea if I can maintain this early pace, or how much a fight my first victim will put up. I must say it is hard to stop myself wanting to invest in long term colonial projects and build big ships instead.'

LTWars (Tempus Fugit Games, Playtest)
Robin Orman - 'I've recently taken over a drop-out position in Game 01, whilst waiting for Game 02 to start (still places available in this *free* playtest game - get them while they're hot!). Since I joined from Turn 13, most bugs already seem to have been eliminated, and I can get on with establishing a dominant position for the newly re-named "War Lords" gang. My predecessor has left me with a large number of men and well-placed territory, so I feel I'm in with a good chance here.'

MiddleEarth PBM (Harlequin Games)
Mike Absolom - 'Despite my own cautionary words that "less is often more", I have taken a second 1650 position. A neutral. Heavy on diplomacy, especially early on, the neutral provides a different challenge (especially as, to my mind, the starting characters of my chosen neutral seem to be weaker than those of either the Freep or DS). Resource rich - character and artefact poor. Such is the challenge of the neutral.

Other than that, nothing to report other than continued praise for the friendly and professional GMing of MEPBM.'

Paul Moreno - 'You get to live the Tolkien books through the game, better then watching the movies.'

Monster Island (KJC Games)
Michael Grant - 'Haliok's having fun in his quest for knowledge. He's now kitted out with a carved club and helmet and has just discovered the secrets to making gauntlets and bucklers. Let the other monsters here beware, for one day Haliok shall rule this wild island paradise! Might be a while yet though as his ass has been well and truly kicked on several occasions and I'm sure there's more to come...

The Yahoo groups have proven a useful source of information. The more experienced players have been extremely helpful to a poor newbee not a million miles away.'

Quest GME (KJC Games)

Michael Grant - 'Combat breakdowns have now been added to party v party battles. It's an excellent feature which clearly shows what each of your characters did during the fight. Party v monster fights have shown this information for a while now.

Another addition is a list of known settlements printed on your turnsheets. This helps with the 50 point Novala miracle, Transportability, as you can only cast it on settlements you've visited before.

The critical hit/avoidance system has been clarified. All fighter classes gain a bonus with warriors and brawlers getting the most. Dwarves and Humans also gain a bonus. This will hopefully redress an imbalance in the combat system.

Most players were recruiting Halfbloods and Elves as these races have lots of other pluses in their favour. But now while the Dwarven Brawlers may be slow they'll be dishing out more criticals than the likes of the previously favoured Halfblood Berserkers and Elven Archers. Time will tell if this evens out the power of races and classes.'

Star Fleet Warlord (Pagoda Games)

Robin Orman - 'The *EH7* team game continues with the UK Coalition getting to grips with the US Alliance across the board. No clear leader yet, although the UK has 107 kills to the US's 29, which gives me a nice warm feeling inside. I expect one side to have the upper hand by the next Flagship, but at the moment it could go either way...

Standard Game *E18* has started recently, and the first few turns have run by. A slightly smaller map than E16 with 18 players, but maintaining the extended victory conditions used previously. Buckets, mops and phase pistols at the ready, Corellis Cleaning once more sets out to conquer the galaxy...'

Tribe Net (*Peter Rzechorzek*)

Joe McCarthy - 'The war between the forces of Bushido and the tribes of the Way of the Blue Wolf is now entering its sixth month and the bloodletting is showing little sign of slacking. The citizen-warriors of the Blue Wolf tribes have faced the hardened Samurai warriors of Bushido and have defeated them in open battle, though often at terrible cost.

The Bushido Ookami Shinobinen have been mutilated and nearly destroyed, and the Yamato Empire has suffered thousands of casualties and the total destruction of a major army. The Bushido tribe, the Yongoe Gitters, have been stopped in their tracks with heavy casualties, and the Gunshin have been bloodied severely. The Blue Wolf clans of the Unggirad, Ry-Cian, Mughuls, and the Rus have distinguished themselves and have shown no letup in the pressure on the invaders. The initial Bushido successes against the Blue Wolf have proved more pitch, than water, on the fires in their warrior bellies.

A discovery of great interest to the tribes watching this contest is the difference in quality of the Samurai and Regular Bushido warriors. Their Samurai are some of the fiercest and most dangerous fighters so far encountered on any battlefield. They have caused massive casualties where they have been engaged, and will fight to the death wherever they are committed. Samurai do not retreat, and Samurai do not panic. But the rest of the army is of very indifferent quality. It is as if the Bushido warlords lavished all their attention on their Samurai and neglected the rank and file. Blue Wolf warriors have proved far superior to these common warriors, and many times the only difference between complete route and orderly retreat has been the small group of Samurai holding the center together. And Samurai are as vulnerable to massed archers as anyone else.

There are many questions to be answered in this bloody war. But it is obvious that Bushido will emerge from this war crippled and bleeding at best, and utterly destroyed at worst. Even if they succeed in driving the attacking Blue Wolf armies away, something that is much open to question, they will be left exhausted by their pyrrhic victory, and will be vulnerable to the next group that comes along. When they picked a fight with the Blue Wolf, they picked a fight they could not win.'

Total Conquest PBeM (Total Conquest)

Neil McCann - 'I had some problems installing the graphical interface, but after an email to support I was sorted out - reply coming back within two hours. I am only a few turns into my first game, but so far I am impressed. Very good atmosphere, friendly players, lots of game options. The Elves on my east declared war on me last turn as expected and I tasted defeat on my very first battle. Still, my Dwarven Slayers lie in waiting, my main army unharmed - this war has just begun!'

Nikola Kasherov - 'A world of wonder, a world of conquest. I have travelled through many fantasy universes on the web in my search for the ultimate strategy experience and fun. And only Total Conquest led me close to the border between reality and imagination.

I was looking for a fantasy game with rich and various paradigms, interesting and balanced gameplay. These are only some of the features I enjoy while playing this turn-based bloody competition. Of course, there are elements of the system which need to be improved but let me first give you some notion of the game.

You have a great variety of options to choose from when forming the general profile of your kingdom. The most important ones are race and culture. You can choose from the four major races and nine different cultures, each combination of which ensures unique strategy, strong points and disadvantages. The manual is pretty long to read but it reflects the complexity of the game. Victory can be achieved only by smart management of magic, economic and military factors, as well as taking into consideration the specific strengths and uses of your heroes. The game is played through a nice java client so you enjoy a detailed colourful map with perfect view of the situation. The turns are every two or four days in the general case, depending on the game type you play. This could be plenty of time for those used to the fast intensive gameplay of the standard PC games. But against a pack of experienced players it can take you hours to define your course of action. I have spent a number of restless nights rethinking my moves, and I have definitely enjoyed it -if you join seek out Goldenleaf for some chat on the game!'

Frank Werner - 'I had expected Total Conquest to be another easy and fast web game but I was wrong. It is a medium complexity wargame that reminds me of tabletop gaming, but with many players. TC gives the player a lot to think about and many roads to victory. Very high on the diplomacy front - if you do not like talking this game is not for you! Most games are won by alliances, and I loved the alliance system which allows for excellent cooperation between its members. The only drawback that I have found so far is that if you miss a turn when you are at war, it can be disastrous for your kingdom - things can move very fast, and missing a last turn might as well cost me the game.'

Panayotis Mavridis - 'I joined Total Conquest because two of my friends were playing it and said it was a great game. All three of us joined game 9, a 30-player game in the Western Antalia contingent. I choose to be barbaric Orcs: the race because Orcs simply rule, and the barbaric culture because it gives some very good troops and also double material production - the only drawback being that I could not build level 3 holdings; but who cares, I could not imagine Orcs being anything else than barbaric anyway!

There was a lot of excitement when the game was about to start, I could see most of the players online every day, diplomacy going back and forth. Roleplaying was evident, and I really enjoyed some of the messages I received, although my own roleplaying as an orc was limited to a few insults and grudges! Then the game began. You could see the kingdoms spreading out in the strategic map, colours filling the neutral white areas of the map as kingdoms raced for land. Out of the 30 players only three dropped out, with two immediately picked up by new players, leaving only one position inactive. And guess who was next to it? I conquered the only inactive kingdom in the game a few turns later, an instant messaging informing me of my success as soon as I logged into the site!

The game was easy to learn, and very soon I was in complete control of what I was doing. However, after the neutral sectors ran out, mayhem broke out in the game with kingdoms attacking each other. On the north there were many orcs like myself, and rumours started of a powerful orcish alliance that would rule the north. I was tempted to join at first. However those orcs were being run by some experienced TC players, and the guys knew each other, so I thought I wait and see how it develops. Their armies marched largely uncontested in the north, clearing any non-orcs with speed for some time.

On the other side of the map, to the south, all was chaos. I could read the reports of the battles and hero assassinations all over, and I could see the little Xs on the strategic map that indicated battles, spreading like plague everywhere! I think there was some betrayal involved somewhere, because there were 'friendly' insults exchanged in the forums and I remember a kingdom fighting to the very last hex. I thought that was brave, but after some time I realized that it was common practice in TC: since your total victory points score in all the games you play is always recorded in the Hall of Fame for as long as you play, (and with which you advance in rank after some time) there is always a reason for someone to stay; the cost of a turn is so low anyway that you do not care. Anyway, on my south I had an ally (one of my friends) and the two kingdoms on my north had engaged in hostilities, so when I was contacted by an Elf player on my east to attack the orcs while they were engaged elsewhere, I made up my mind and we both attacked the most western kingdom of the (unofficial, yet) orcish alliance.

I cannot really describe now what happened in the game in detail after that, because there were so many things happening very fast. All I can say is that for a few weeks (turnaround is every four days) all I was thinking and discussing was that game - the forums were full of messages every day, and there was so much fighting and mayhem that you could not follow everything! Without going into much detail, what basically happened was that after our initial successes (brought up by our surprise attack) against the orcs, we were pushed back, and the orc allies of the kingdom we attacked moved through his lands in a fast-counter attack that caught my ally by surprise. In the end he fell in three or four turns, and I was left alone to fight the Orcish menace as the (official, now) orcish alliance marched west. The amount of battle reports and duels I received every turn was amazing: it was as if hell itself had marched upon my kingdom, but still I was holding.

Not for long, though. To make a long story short, I eventually lost. I did put up a very good fight and they congratulated me for that since I was a newbie, but in the end experience counts in this game, and it gave my enemies the edge they needed. While I was going down, and given their successes on the other fronts, the orcish

alliance become a threat to the game, and I was getting diplos and aid from other kingdoms on the south after a while, but it was too late for me by then. I also lost a few turns due to going on holidays (summer you see!) which were crucial, but my main regret is that I have not done what I could on the political front - I should have looked for allies earlier. Instead I fought them alone, while they were clearing potential enemies with diplomacy and they were able to concentrate. I really loved the alliance system of Total Conquest: it allows for so much interaction and cooperation between players that boosts the enjoyment you get from the game. If only I had used it earlier, the orcs would not have been so successful.

My friend tells me that the game still goes on, and it has now developed into a world war between the southern kingdoms and the orcish alliance. The orcs are winning, but I was told that they requested from the GMs to allow the game run after the VP limit to a 'last alliance standing' game, because they do not want it to end! After I come back from holidays I will definitely sign up for the next TC game. This time, I will not be a newcomer!'

Costas Xiroyannis - 'Total Conquest is a PBM that successfully combines strategy and tactical warfare with heroes and magic. Although it is a strategy PBM, meaning hordes and armies play the most important role, strong individuals can make a difference, as heroes play an important role too. The game has a very simple Instant Messaging system and several chatrooms, so roleplaying becomes a part of the game, while diplomacy becomes a necessity.'

Nasos Chabipis - 'What won me in Total Conquest is the ability to totally customize your kingdom. You can customize your kingdom during the startup and carry on doing that through playing. The game offers several alternative ways to win, so no pattern need to be followed. One can play the game marching with a strong army, while another might seek power through quests and artifacts. One may form a party of lethal heroes, while another can rely on his economy and wonders to win the game. When there are choices a game never becomes boring.'

The Thumping of Ground 8 (Agema Publications)
Chris Morris - 'Looks good so far. The bit I like best is the inclusion of a need to co-operate to ensure air supplies - if everyone tries to hitch a free list, the system collapses.'

Tribe Net (Peter Rzechorzek)
Antony Dunks - 'My closest neighbour has dropped out, leaving me to make a choice, do I stay with the game and try and politically dominate the region, or do I drop out? Commitments to allies elsewhere in the game mean at the very least I'll stay for another year, giving time for plenty of warning should I decide to go. Tribe Net is a great game if you have someone to talk with, but on your own, it is just a game of moving numbers from one column to another.'

Worlds Apart (Colin Andrews)
Martin Helsdon - 'Colin Andrew's Four Worlds campaign continues its dark and sinister twists and turns, with the GM as creative and inventive as ever. Great fun even so. Rumour has it that soon we will all return to his old haunts in the North West of Saturnalia...'

Xott Grande (Antony Dunks)
Carol Mulholland - 'A team game with a fantasy setting and monthly turns. At least, I hope it's a team game - my character won't last long if it isn't, any more than one of those Star Trek survey party members.

Ingerjald the female dwarf is one of an assorted group of adventurers who's been summoned to the Palace by the Questing Stone. There they find that Prince Julien has been turned into a woman by a potion which his mother had expected would turn him into a frog and hence into a caring bridegroom. Ingerjald thinks the prince has done pretty well from this mix-up, as women rank high in her dwarven culture and he's become a beauty, but Julien/Julienne is horrified by his/her transformation. Never mind, she'll soon get him/her suitably clad and educated in the business of womanhood: she hopes. He wants the spell cancelled, foolish fellow... Fun stuff.'

MMORPGs
Everquest: The Legacy of Ykesha
Alex Harris - 'I love EverQuest as much as the next dork, but even I wish Sony would ease up on the expansions a bit. When the most noteworthy feature of your new expansion is the ability to roleplay a frog, maybe that's a sign you're running low on ideas. The new playable Froglok race is the big new hook of The Legacy of Ykesha, which Sony is offering as a $21.99 download, but it's not really the coolest feature, except maybe for French (err, I mean, "Freedom") people. For me, the saving grace here is the continued refinement of the basic EQ interface and gameplay.

Most notably, all players now have immediate access to an automap, which not only marks your location, but also notes all major NPC vendors (and what they sell), significantly reducing the "Where the hell am I?" factor. A new journal keeps track of all NPC conversations, theoretically making it easier to track quests, but it would've been infinitely better with more automation -- right now it takes a lot of

hands-on maintenance to prevent it from getting overloaded with every useless thing every NPC says to you. Some of the other additions include five new zones and new spells for high-level players, a Looking For Group tool, a new inventory slot for charms -- but as I think about these and everything else here, I just can't help but wonder: Why wasn't this a free download?'

COMPUTER GAMES
Enclave
Alex Harris - 'Enclave is precisely the sort of game fated barely to register in the consciousness of gamers before being entirely forgotten -- unless you're one of the unfortunate few who actually played the heaping pile of awful that is this Xbox port. For those sorry sad-sacks, nothing short of death is likely to scrub the excruciating memory of this exercise in tedium and boneheaded design from their minds. I wish I could offer some sort of succor to you, but I'm all too aware of how futile an endeavor that is. You see, I too have played through Enclave, and life shall never seem sweet again.

This graphically rich but gameplay bankrupt third-person action game lets you guide a variety of character classes through beautifully lit yet horribly designed levels until blood pours out of your eyes like tears. There's some claptrap plot, which makes something less than absolutely no sense at all, but all you really need to know is that the Forces of Light are fighting the Creatures of Darkness. You have to complete the Light campaign to unlock the Darkness campaign, which is ostensibly much harder, if only because you have to muster up the will to keep playing instead of sticking your head in the oven.

Before each misbegotten mission you can select and equip whatever class of character you want. This isn't as unrelentingly hideous as most of the game. Not being locked into a single class is a kind of cool idea -- you can jump from a knight to an archer to a druid and more. The drawback is that they all pretty much stink like a big gooey pile of decaying roadkill since the combat is so shallow that all the classes boil down to (a) ranged combat where you die when the enemies get near you, or (b) hand-to-hand combat where you die even faster. Enclave seems to be going for quick-paced brutal fighting, but the vulnerability of your characters coupled with the viciousness of enemies and moronic paucity of healing potions makes every combat a long, protracted, and mind-bogglingly unrewarding affair.

Ratcheting this up to new levels of aggravation is the save system. There isn't one. Oh, there are maybe one or two checkpoints scattered along the way, but these don't save your game, they're merely respawn points for if you should die during a level. Should you need to stop for any reason, like the game crashing for the seventh straight time in the exact same damn spot no matter what you do, well, you're out of luck, my friend. Let's see, what else absolutely sucks about Enclave? I've got one -- you find items during a mission and can use them, but suddenly have to purchase them to use them for the next mission. Your precious healing potions vanish mission to mission: that's pretty lousy. You have to buy everything, but you can't sell anything you pick up. The camera complicates combat needlessly.

There's more, believe me, but the bottom line is this: Run, don't walk, away from Enclave.'

[Comments welcomed by surface mail to the UK office or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By October 14th, please.]

Hall of Fame

[Any GM is entitled to a free announcement of game winners in the Hall of Fame. Any Flagship subscriber is entitled to a free classified ad (up to 50 words) for any non-commercial game-related purpose. Further words (and all words for non-subscribers and commercial ads) are 15p/word, 20p bold or £10 per single column inch semi-display. Please send payment in advance to avoid invoicing for small amounts.]

CRISIS! - Time Patterns
Game 27 was won by FALKLANDS (**Ray Thompson**), with OMAN (**Gary Bowskill**) as a valiant runner-up. Congratulations, chaps!

SERIM RAL - Mindless Games
MSR20 and **MSR21** have drawn to a close.
MSR20 was won by the Followers of Lenthinia, Goddess of Love and Peace(?) (comprising Freya, Mistlehoof and Abarsis).
MSR21 was won by Boralis, Follower of Rimfaril God of Winter (with Doughnut the Rotund a close runner-up).
Both games were completed with massive battles in the Arena of Lost Souls in which much blood was shed and many many troops lost their lives.

Feedback on Issue 103

Issue 103 polled 8.04, with votes ranging between 9 and 6. Several of you praised the cover. 'I know that appreciation of the aesthetic is purely subjective,' says **Mike Absolom**, 'but I particularly like this one.' **David Blair** is disappointed in the lack of a sports column, 'I am sure there is a role for the genre so the mag is not quite complete.'

Rumours From The Front was your favourite feature, with Newsdesk close behind: 'It's always good to know what's going on so that my wife knows what she can buy me for birthday,' says **Tom Hoefle**. Legends followed, then Lords of the Earth, then the card and boardgames articles, then Adventurers Guild and Heldenwelt. Neutral Zone was applauded by some, disliked as a sports game by others. The short articles on Austerlitz were enjoyed by many, but **Jason Brown** thought them 'poorly written' and wonders whether Lords of the Earth and Middle Earth both attract better writers because of their literary connections; **Antony Dunks** warns that a series on the positions 'will take another two and a half years to get through', ulp. The personal columns were popular. **Jason Brown** singled out those by Dave Panchyk and Eric Ridley, 'both were well written, amusing, informative and not afraid to call a spade a spade,' while **Antony Dunks** praises Lisa Fordham: 'she seems to say what I have been thinking myself.' Several of you liked the topicality of the article about War and Gaming, but **Jason Brown** felt that the 'subject matter had the potential to provide a thought-provoking article, but I felt that the end product was a little anodyne.'

Nothing was universally rated as boring, though **Robin Orman** sighs 'there was little that peaked my interest' and **Antony Dunks** includes 'anything I do not play myself, which now that Flagship has broadened its remit, seems more each issue.'

Question 4 asked if you'd avoid games where real-life events follow too closely. None of you picked the options that said Yes, and a handful said No because you like your games to be close to reality or feel that playing a game about real life makes you understand it better. Mostly, though, you ignored the options, feeling like **Michael Grant**, that 'Games are games and real life is real life. One should not affect the other.' **Chris Morris** points out that 'Real life is frequently far more outrageous than anything invented in a game.' 'I do not play games that could resemble real life,' says **Antony Dunks**, 'though if they did, I would be too amazed to stop playing.' 'I would love,' says **Jason Brown**, 'to be able to say that "I feel more sympathy for real life forces than I feel for my game forces". That would be mature, adult and responsible. But, well, I'm a *gamer*! Of *course* the fate of Elwin Longears the elven ranger is of more interest to me than the fate of Tony Blair.'

Question 5 asked whether you object to young players. 54% of you don't wonder at all about other players' ages ('Everyone has something to contribute' - **Michael Grant**). There's an objection to not playing seriously and to dropouts ('but they apply to *any* player, no matter the age range' - **Robin Orman**). Some of you feel that young players aren't able to accept misfortune, but **Jason Brown** argues that 'The vitality of youth is what keeps the world from turning into Dullsville' and **Chris Morris** points out that many historical leaders behaved 'like a pack of teenagers' because that's what they were!

Everyone spotted that there wasn't a question 6, oops. 'The case of the disappearing question? Watson! The game's afoot,' chuckles **Michael Grant**.

So, the *final* question asked what age you were when you started playing games. 63% were under 12, like **Tom Hoefle** ('I played games all my life as my parents started this with me'), 21% were 13-17 and the remaining 16% were 18-25. Your childhood games were Cluedo, Monopoly, Risk, Mastermind ('which I still love' - **Jason Brown**) and Chess. **Antony Dunks** started playing roleplaying games at 15, 'as well as board games and war games', and **Robin Orman** remembers starting PBM at 14 with Necromancer and Lizards from Madhouse. **Michael Grant** 'got into gaming quite late in life and purely by accident. I'd started a new job and got chatting with someone and he mentioned I should try his local gaming club. The rest is RPG history.' Ah, memories...

Many thanks to you all.

Feedback on Issue 104

1 - Please rate this issue from 1 (insipid) to 10 (inspiring).
2 - Which articles/sections did you most enjoy, and why?
3 - Which bored you, and why?
4 - Games tend to get bad publicity in the general press. Does this concern you?
(a) Yes, I take my games seriously and expect others to do the same.
(b) Yes, my relatives try to persuade me to do other things.
(c) Journalists are just out for an easy story.
(d) Pish, I'd send my Warrior out against any libellers.
5 - A letter mentions publicity efforts. Which do you favour?
(a) Persuading existing gamers to try new games by attending conventions.
(b) Advertising in a range of magazines.
(c) Providing reviews and comments for easy access online.
(d) Designing games specifically to attract newcomers.
(e) Advertising free games for newcomers.
6 - What sort of new game would appeal most to you?
(a) One that's easy to learn and doesn't take long to play.
(b) One that's likely to attract lots of other players.
(c) One that links with a favourite book or TV series.
(d) One that's got plenty of depth to it.

[Replies welcomed by surface mail to the UK office, or by email to carol@pbmgames.com. By October 4th, please.]

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Gameskeeper, 105 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1HU

01865-721348
shop@gameskeeper.co.uk
www.gameskeeper.co.uk

Games Legion, Ashlar House, 15 Mason Close, Great Sutton, Cheshire, L66 2GU

The Games Store, The Manor House, Eagle, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, LN6 9DG

Gaming Crypt, 50 Castleton Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B42 2RR

The Hidden Fortress, 51 East Street, Southampton, SO14 3HX
02380-710550
enquiries@hidden-fortress.com
www.hidden-fortress.com

Krackers Games Shop, 1-5 The Fore Street Centre, Fore Street, Exeter, Devon

Krackers Games Shop, 5 Bath Place, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ER

Not Just Stamps, 17 Crendon Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP13 6LJ

Ottakar's, 102 Curzon Mall, Queensmere Centre , Slough, Berkshire , SL1 1DQ

Playin' Games, 33 Museum Street, London, WC1A 1LH

Roaring Ogre games, 53 Staple Hill Road, Fishponds, Bristol, Avon, BS16 5AB

Wayland's Forge, 37 Auchinlek Square, Fiveways Shopping Centre, Edgebaston, B15 1DV
0121-687-0105
games@waylandsforge.co.uk
www.waylandsforge.co.uk

Westgate Games, 20 The Borough, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 2DR
01227-457257
andrew@westgategames.fsnet.co.uk

Galactic View

WE'VE BEEN busy checking all the games and firms that we list in *Galactic View*, so we're fairly confident that all the firms listed were active at time of going to press. If we've dropped a firm or game that you know exists, ask the GM to get in touch with us.

GV is a list of (mostly) European PBM/PBeM firms known by FLAGSHIP to be operating at the time this issue was published.

There is no cost to GMs for this listing, which we publish as a service to our readers. GMs listed below are cross-indexed by a code to the game register on the following pages. GMs to whom payment should be made by name appear listed by name rather than firm.

UK, EUROPEAN & WEB-BASED GMs

McC Ab Initio Games, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent BR2 0YQ
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: danny.mcconnell@virgin.net
TEL: 020 8325 2448

ADA Adams, David
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote04/index.html
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote11/index.html
EM: davester@oz.net
EM: davester@oz.net

AGE Advanced Gaming Enterprises, POB 214949, Sacramento, CA 95821, USA
WEB: www.ageforfun.com
EM: davester@oz.net

AGM Agema Publications, 3 Worksop Rd, Off Carlton Rd, Sneinton, Nottingham NG3 2BA
WEB: go.to/agema
EM: agema@lineone.net

AND Andrews, Colin, 26 Brown Edge Road, Holts, Oldham, OL4 5QG
ARN Arnott, Steven,
WEB: www.sjsystems.co.uk/
EM: g3@notreally.co.uk

BAI Baird, Phil, 930 NE 63d Ave, Portland, OR 97213, USA
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords/lote11/index.html
EM: phillipbaird@printmail.com

BRI Briny En Gardel (Terry Crook), 11Laurie close, Burniston, Scarborough. N.Yorks, YO13 0JQ
WEB: www.brinyengarde.com

BUO Martin Burroughs, 15 New Earth Street, Oldham, OL4 5ES
WEB: http://mpweb.tiscali.co.uk/teepeeyell/index.htm
EM: martinburroughs@tiscali.co.uk

BUR Burrows, Pete, Buzzwack PBM, 8 Magnolia Court, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 3LG
WEB: www.buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk
EM: pete@buzzwackpbm.freeserve.co.uk

CEN Central de Jocs SL, C/Numancia no. 112-116, 08029 - Barcelona, Spain
WEB: www.centraldejocs.com
EM: toronsmjpc@menta.net

CRA Craisworld, 4 Barleyfield, Clayton-le-Woods, Preston, Lancs, PR5 8LQ
WEB: www.craisworld.com
EM: andy@craisworld.com
TEL: (Andy Smith) 01772 334878

CSP CSP, Alfred-Buchererstr. 63, 53115 Bonn, (German)
WEB: www.the-ashes-of-empire.de (German)
WEB: http://home.t-online.de/home/ashes_of_empire/ashes2.htm (English)
EM: h.topf@cspp.com

DWG Dark Wolf Games, BCM Darkwolf, London, WC1N 3XX
WEB: www.darkwolf.ie
EM: pbm@darkwolf.ie
TEL: (Kain): 070 2099 WORG (9674), FAX: 0870 052 7521

DRC Dracs Games, 21 Chipperfield Drive, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 4DP
WEB: www.dracsgames.co.uk
EM: derek@dracsgames.co.uk
TEL: (Derek Rainey): 0117 9607173 (9am-6pm Mon-Fri)

DRE Dreamworld Games
WEB: www.logicalsoccer.com / www.reallyracing.com

DUN Dunks, Antony, Far Horizon, Sark, Guernsey, GY9 0SE
WEB: www.sark.net/~xott
EM: xott@sark.net

EPM Entertainment Plus More Games, PO Box 2578, Appleton, WI 54912, USA
WEB: www.epmgames.com
EM: og@epmgames.com

EVA Evans, Paul, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge UB10 8UF
WEB: www.pevans.co.uk
EM: paul@pevans.co.uk

FAR Faraway Games, 3 Maslem Rd, St Albans, Herts AL4 0GS
WEB: www.faraway.co.uk
EM: jgibbons@faraway.co.uk

FBI Flying Buffalo
WEB: http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/
EM: rick@flyingbuffalo.com

GBM Games by Mail, Bridge Street, Neston, S Wirral CH64 9UJ
WEB: Games.ByMail.co.uk
EM: colin@gamesbymail.co.uk
TEL: (Colin, Yvonne, Traci): 0151 3361412
FAX: 0151 3361009

GLO Glover, Adrian, 4 Srevanne Court, Lessness Park, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5BG
WEB: www.throneworld.com/lords

HAR Harlan, Thomas, 3210 East 23rd Street, Tuscon, AR 85713, USA

HAQ Harlequin Games, 340 North Road, Cardiff CF14 3BP
WEB: www.harlequingames.com
EM: pbm@harlequingames.com
TEL: 029 2091 3359 (9-6.30 weekdays) - Middle Earth only
AND
TEL: (Sam Roads): 029 2062 5665 (9-6.30 weekdays)
FAX:029 2062 5532 any time

HKM Hunky Monkey Games, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS
WEB: www.hunkymonkey.co.uk
EM: ape@hunkymonkey.co.uk

INC Incubus Designs, POB 263, Loughborough LE11 1ZG
WEB: www.incubusdesigns.co.uk
EM: inqbus@globalnet.co.uk
TEL: 01509 217957
FAX: 01509 558788

INT Interesting Times, 10 Belmont Avenue, Barnet, London, EN4 9LJ
WEB: www.interesting-times.co.uk
EM: startup@interesting-times.co.uk
TEL: 07050 658333
FAX: 07050 658384

JAD Jade Enterprises, 127 Queen Adelaide Court, Penge, London, SE20 7EB
WEB: www.jade.ent
EM: jade@ntlworld.com

KAM Kamikaze Games
WEB: www.kamikazegames.com

KJC KJC Games, FREEPOST, Thornton-Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 3UL
WEB: www.kjcgames.com
EM: enquiry@kjcgames.com
TEL: 01253 866345

LLO Lloyd, Rich, 79 Farmersville Road, Califon, NJ 07830, USA
EM: lords4@throneworld.com
TEL: (908) 832-5176

MAD Madhouse, 6 Alexandra Road, Wisbech, PE13 1HQ
WEB: www.madcentral.com
EM: madcentral@aol.com
TEL: 01945 583811

MIN Mindless Games, 5 Basford Road, Nottingham, NG6 0JP
WEB: www.mindlessgames.com
EM: andy.mindless@virgin.net
TEL: (Andy Simmonds): 0115 979 0797 (9.30 -6.30 weekdays only)

NEU Neutral Zone, 33 Rockall Close, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 0LU
WEB: www.neutral-zone-football-pbem.co.uk
EM: info@neutral-zone-football-pbem.co.uk
TEL: 01440 713124 (7pm - 9pm)

OAT Oates, Jason, 6 St Georges Rd, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1PA
WEB: http://freespace.virgin.net/jason.oates
EM: jason.oates@virgin.net

OLY Olympia Games, 6 Sandy Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3GS
WEB: www.madcentral.com
TEL/FAX: 01305 251451

PAG Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffs B77 4QQ
WEB: www.pagodagames.co.uk
EM: orders@pagodagames.co.uk
TEL/FAX: (Keith Burnham): 01827 703251

PAL
PIN Pinder, Mark, 139 Nelson Way, Laceby Acres, Grimsby, S.Humberside DN34 5UJ
WEB: http://groups.msn.com/elvaria
EM: Markpinder@aol.com
TEL: 01472 753430

QIR Quirvel Games, Quirvel Games Gbr, Am Pannofen 7, 47608 Geldern, Germany
EM: quirxelgames@t-online.de

REB Rebus Games, 70 Greenfield Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8HJ
EM: dominicm@zoom.co.uk

RCW Received Wisdom, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP
WEB: www.receivedwisdom.org
EM: stu@receivedwisdom.org

ROL Rolling Thunder Games Inc., PO Box 310, Eastlake, CO 80614-0310, USA
EM: supernova@rollingthunder.com

RZE Rzechorzek, Peter
WEB: www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/2187/tribenet.htm
EM: tribenet@netspace.net.au

SSV SSV Klapf-Bachler OEG Postfach 1205, A-8021, Graz, Austria
WEB: www.heldenwelt.com
EM: ssv-graz@aon.at

SCR Scriven, David, 15 Alandale Grove, Garforth, Leeds, LS25, 1DJ
SEV Sevenstar Games, 57 Olympia Gardens, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1JQ
WEB: www.sark.net/~xott/greensun.html
EM: greensun@nickel.globalnet.co.uk

SIL Silver Dreamer, 174 Charles St, Greenhithe, Dartford, Kent DA9 9AJ
WEB: www.silverdreamer.com
EM: silverdrea@aol.com
TEL: (Justin Parsler): 01322 387195 (Mon-Fri, 11-6)

SOF Software Simulations, PO Box 2758, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2XH
WEB: www.pbmsports.com
EM: peter@gpbmsports.com

SPN Spencer, Jerry, 51 Elm Vale, Liverpool L6 8NY
EM: jerry.spencer@liverpool.gov.uk

SPO Sporting Dreams, PO Box 5423, Derby, DE21 2ZB
WEB: www.sportingdreams.com
EM: info@sportingdreams.com
and info@greyhoundtrainer.com
TEL: 01332 726376

SUP Supersonic Games, PO Box 1812, Galston, KA4 8WA
EM: sam@austerlitz.co.uk

TFT Tempus Fugit PBM Productions 96 Bishopswood Road, Tadley, Hants RG26 4HG
WEB: http://tempusfugitpbm.co.uk
EM: enquiries@tempusfugitpbm.co.uk
TEL: (Scott, Sam, Chris): 01563 821022; fax 01563 821006

TDJ Terre de Jeux, 88 Avenue de Jussieu, 91600 Savigny sur Orge, France
EM: isasol@club-internet.fr

TIM Time Patterns, 14 The Hollows, Exmouth, Devon EX8 1QT
WEB: www.timepatterns.co.uk
EM: carol@timepatterns.co.uk
TEL/FAX: 01395 276632

TIW Timewyrm, 2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon, EX1 1BS
WEB: www.timewyrm.co.uk
EM: colin@timewyrm.co.uk
TEL: (Colin Forbes): 01392 420582

TOT Total Conquest,
WEB: www.total-conquest.com
EM: support@total-conquest.com

ULA Ulaidh Games, 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast BT6 0NF
EM: chrisjan.morris@virgin.net

WHS White, Stephen, 43 Sandiway Drive, Briercliffe, Burnley, Lancs., BB10 2JS
WWG WOW Games,
WEB: http://www.wow.pbemgame.com/

XAN Xanthis, Constantine, 7080 NW 75th Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33067, USA
EM: cxren@lycos.com

Zine Listings

This list only contains details of Zines and Zine Editors who have been in contact with Flagship.

Abyssinian Prince, Jim Burgess, 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA (Email: burgess@world.std.com)

Armistice Day, Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drove, Brighton, BN1 6LA (Email: stephen@armisticeday.com)

Boris the Spider, (Email: ptbolduc@aol.com)

Carnel Robert Rees, Top Floor Flat, 22 Victoria Square, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4ES. EM: carnel@talk21.com (www.geocities.com/shudderflx/carnel)

Devolution, Tony Robbins, Lincoln House, Creaton Rd, Hollowell, Northants, NN6 8RP (Email: tony@hollowell.plus.com)

Diplomacy 2000, www.lancedal.demon.co.uk/dip2000/

Flights of Fancy, Philip Honeybone, Email: phil@melly98.freeserve.co.uk

For Whom The Die Rolls, 14 Stepnells, Marsworth, Nr Tring, Herts. HP234NQ(Email: Keith@Thomasson.com)

Mission From God, John Harrington, 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW(www.fbgames.co.uk mfg@fbgames.co.uk)

Ode, John Marsden, 91 Westwood Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9RS (Email: John@ode_online.net)

off-the-shelf, Tom Howell, 365 StormKingRoad, PortAngeles, WA 98363, USA (Web publication only)

Psychopath, www.psychozine.co.uk (Web publication only.)

Rhein-Neckar-Zine, (German language), Lukas Kautzsch, An der Rossweid 18a, 76229 Karlsruhe, Germany, (Email: lukas@oberful.de)

S.O.B., Chris Hassler, 2000 S. Armour Ct, La Habra, CA90631 USA (Email: chassler@adelphia.net)

Serendipity, John Webley, Topferreihe 4, 38259 Salzgitter, Germany (Email: jjwebley@aol.com)

Strangitude, Paul Sands, Flat 2, 432 Birmingham Rd, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1YJ (Email: strangezine@lineone.net)

To Win Just Once, Paul Evans, 180 Aylsham Drive, Uxbridge, UB108UF (Email: twjo@pevans.co.uk)

Variable Pig, Jim Reader, Vredelanstraat20,3633EC, Vreeland,NETHERLANDS (Email:cj.reader@wanadoo.nl)

HOW TO READ THE GALACTIC VIEW TABLES

- **Process** shows if the game is run by computer (C), human (H) or mixed (M). The **Duration** of the game is shown by O (Open-ended) or F (Finite).
- **GM** is the GM's code shown in our listing of European & Web-based firms.
- **Medium** shows whether a game is available via email (e), paper (p) or web-based play (w). Language is also indicated here where a game is offered other than in English. **(G)** German,
- **Start-up** shows how much you will pay to begin playing the game. * indicates deposit returnable if you play to the end of the game, or prepayment discounts available (see moderator for details).
- **Free Turns** – many GMs will give you a number of free turns at the start of the game
- **Turn Fee** – how much each turn costs. * means that return postage is paid by the GM each turn. **S** means you need to send an SSAE or at least pay for the GM's postage.
- **Other Fees** – the following footnotes apply: **(a)** more for larger positions or later turns in the game, **(b)** more for battle reports, **(c)** more for extended orders/longer reports, **(d)** indicates no credit refunds available. **(f)** higher start-up fee for paper rules
- **Flagship Ref.** shows the issue of Flagship where you can find the best description so far. **a**=article, **s**=Spokesmen Speak, **d**=diary. Thus, 4s means "Spokesmen Speak issue #4". • indicates a 'Euro-friendly' game: deadlines at least two weeks apart and prices for Continental players not more than 30% above those listed here.
- **Note** – occasional optional extras like a newsletter are not included in the prices unless we judge that they are fairly frequent and essential for enjoyment of the game. Some GMs give discounts if you pay for a batch of turns in advance. Some offer reduced fees for email play.

All prices are generally for the UK and are given in £'s except where noted. Non-UK European players should note that rates are usually about 25% higher than for UK players. If in doubt, contact the GMs.

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref
Absolute Fantasy	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£15.00	2	£4.00		81s
Absolute Heroes	M-O	RPG: Superhero	JAD	p	£15.00	2	£4.50	(b)	91a
Absolute Power 2	M-O	Power: Fantasy	SIL	p	£20.00	0	£5.00		
Adventurer Kings	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£5.00	0	£2.50		35a, 72-74d, 88a
Adventurers Guild	C-O	Adventure	EPM	e	Free	1	$10		
Alamaze	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	PAG	p	£15.00	2	£3.50		71a, 80a
Ancient Battles	M-F	Wargame: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	0	£3.50		
Ancient Empires	M-F	Power: Historical	OAT	e, p	£4.00	2	£3.25	£1 month	58a
Ashes of Empire	C-O	Sci-Fi	CSP	e, p	Free	•1.53	-	(c)	98s
Aspects of Might	M-O	Adventure	SIL	p	£2.50	0	£2.50	(d)	94s
Assyria's End II	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£6.00	?	90a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	QIR	G only				(a)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SUP	e, p	£10.00*	0	£3.75	(a)	34s, 96a
Austerlitz	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SSV	?	?	1	c6 Euro		34s, 96a
Australian Empires	C-F	Wargame: Futuristic	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00		101s
Barbarians at the Gate	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.50		101s
Battle Plan	C-O	Wargame	FBI	e	$5	5	£3.50	(a)	19a
Beyond	M-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95		86a
Beyond the Stellar Empire	M-O	Sci-Fi	KJC	p	Free	1	£2.50 - £6.00	-	22a, 83a
Championship League	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SUP	p	Free	4	£1.95	-	53s
Chicken Run	H-O	Sport: Motor Racing	RCW	w	£0.50	0	£0.50	-	
Clansmen	M-O	Tribal	PAL	e	£10.00	2	£5.00	-	101s
Company Commander	M-F	Wargame	OAT	e, p	£12.00	2	£3.50 + £1.50/month	-	96a, 97a
Covert Operations	C-F	Economic	FBI	e	$25 per game	5	n/a	(d)	
Crack of Doom II	M-O	Tribal	HAQ	e	£10.00	5	£4.50	-	96a
Crack of Doom II	C-O	Tribal	AGE	?	$	5	$	-	96a
Dark Age II	C-F	Wargame: Futuristic	SOF	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00	-	51a
Dark Lands	M-O	Power: Historical	SOF	e, p	£5.00	5	£9.00 for 3	(a)	62s
Deathsgate Arena	M-O	Adventure: Arena	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	104s
Destiny	C-O	Adventure	EPM	e	Free	5	$6.00	(a)	100a
Diplomacy	M-F	Sci-Fi	MAD	p	£10.00	4	£3.50	-	
Dominion	H-F	Wargame: Historical	TIW	w	Free	-	Free	-	
Dragonhelm	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	SOF	e, p	£4.50	5	£3.50	-	79a
Dragontech	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	
DungeonWorld	C-O	Adventure	SOF	e, p	£5.00	5	£2.00	(c)	
EGI: Briny	H-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	BRI	p	Free	5	Free	-	
EGI: Dangerous Liaisons	M-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	SPN	p	£25.00	4	£2.00	-	84s, 93a
EGI: LPBS	C-O	RPG: Historical (EGI)	EVA	p	£25.00	4	£2.00	-	34a, 93a
Einstein's Lot	H-O	RPG: Modern	ULA	e	£10.00	2	£3.50	(d)	91a
Election Year	M-O	Misc: Political	FBI	e	£10.00	1	£1.50 + 50p/month	-	
Empires	C-F	Wargame: Historical	SOF	e, p	Free	5	Free	(a)	
Epoch of Might	M-O	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e, p	£4.50	4	£3.50	-	94s
European Empires	C-O	Wargame: Historical	FBI	e	£25.00	2	£3.00	-	63a
Extra Time-Chairman	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SOF	e, p	£5.00	1	£2.00	-	103s
Extra Time-original	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SOF	e, p	Free	0	£2.25	-	53a
Fall of the Roman Empire	M-F	Wargame: Historical	OAT	e, p	£10.00	0	£1.90	(d)	77-80d, 92-94d
Fallen at the First	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRC	e	£3.00	5	£1.50 + 50p/month	(a)	78s
Fantasy Soccer	M-O	Sport: Soccer	KJC	p	£10.00	?	£2.00	-	
Fellowship	C-F	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e, p	£10.00	5	£1.50	-	53a
Feudal Lords	C-F	War: Historical	FBI	e	£5	5	£5.95	-	3a
Feudal Lords: Right of Kings	C-O	?	FBI	?	$5	0	$3.50	-	3a
Fussball-Liga	C-O	Sport: Soccer	LWG	G only	$5	5	$1	-	
Galactic Conflict	H-O	Sci-Fi	SSV	w	Free	?	0.75 Euro	-	
Galactic Invasion 3	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	$5	5	$3.50	-	
Galaxy	C-F	Sci-Fi	ARN	e	Free	6	Free	-	94s
Gameplan	C-F	Sport: American Football	REB	p	£5.00	4	£1.50	-	20a
Gameplan Baseball	C-O	Sport: Baseball	McC	p	£5.00	5	£3.00	-	
Gameplan Boxing	M-O	Sport: Boxing	McC	p	£5.00	0	£9.00 for 4	-	
Gameplan: Advanced	C-O	Sport: American Football	SOF/McC	p	£25 per game	5	£13.00 for 4	-	
Godfather	M-O	Misc: Crime	PAG	e	£10.00	10	£2.50	(a)	73a, 83d
Great White Hunter	C-O	Misc	ARN	e	Free	?	Free	-	
Greyhound Trainer	C-O	Sport: Horse Racing	SPO	w	£5.00	5	£1.00	-	94s
Ground 8	M-O	War: Sci-Fi	AGM	p	£5.00	0	£8.00 for 4	-	
Gunboat Diplomacy	C-O	Power: Historical	MAD	?	£5.00	?	£6.00	(d)	
Haunted Manor	C-F	Adventure	SSV	w	Free	?	Free	(d)	97a
Heldenwelt	C-O	Adventure	MAD	G only	Free	5	6.9 Euro/month	-	
Heroes of Olynthus	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	TIW	e, p	£10.00	0	£3.00	-	88s

Game	Process	Type	GM	Medium	Start-up	Free Turns	Turn Fee	Xtra £	Flagref
Heroic Fantasy	C-O	Adventure	FBI	e	$5	0	$3	-	40a
High Seas	M-O	RPG: Pirate	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95	-	
Hooplian	C-O	Sport:Basketball	MeM	p	£5.00	2	£3.25	-	98a
Horses4Courses: Epsom	M-O	Sport: Horse-Racing	SCR	p	£10.00	5	£10.00	-	
It's a Crime!	C-F	Misc: Crime	KJC	p	Free	2	£2.40	(d)	13a, 77a
Kings of Steel	H-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WHS	p	£5.00	2	£1.85	-	76a, 86-89d
La Gloire du Roi	M-O	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	2	£2.50	(c)	59a, 93a
Lands of Elvaria	H-F	RPG: Fantasy	PIN	e	£10.00	3	£6.00	(d)	90a,93a,96a
Legends	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£20.00	1	£4.00	(c)	90a,93a,96a
LoE: 1	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	SSV	e	5 Euro+	2	£3.70	(a)	(84a), 97a
LoE: 4	M-O	Power: Historical	HAR	e	?	?	5 Euro+		(84a)
LoE: 10	M-O	Power: Historical	LLO	e	?	?	0		(84a)
LoE: 11	M-O	Power: Historical	ADA	e	£5	?	0		(84a)
Mediaeval Empires	M-O	Power: Historical	BAI	e	£5	3	£2.00		
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	War: Historical	SOF	e, p	£10.00	0	£4.50		6a,80a,88a,94a,96a
Middle Earth PBM	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£9.90 a year	0	£9.99 per year		6a,80a,88a,94a,96a
Mighty Heroes	H-O	RPG: Superhero	RCW	?	£9.90 a year	0	n/a	(a)	
Mobius I	C-O	Sci-Fi	FBI	p	$8	0	$8		47a
Monster Island	C-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	2	£2.10		
Mortis Maximus	C-O	Sport: Fictional	MAD	p	£10.00	2	£2.50		
Napoleonic Battles	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	p	£6.00	5	£3.50		
Necromancer	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	MAD	p	Free	0	£2.00		
Nightfall	M-O	RPG: Horror	CRA	e, p	£25.00	5	£5.95		
Neutral Zone	C-O	Sport: American Football	NEU	e, w	£3.50	0	£1.40		
Nuclear Destruction	M-F	Wargame	FBI	e	$5	5	$2.50		
Panzergruppe II	M-O	Wargame	AGM	p	£5.00	5	£3.50		
Peldere	C-F	RPG: Fantasy	CRA	e, p	£25.00	10	£5.95		
Phantasmech	C-O	Adventure	CRA	e, p	£29.95	0	£2.95		
Play On	C-O	Sport: Aussie Rules	McC	p	AUS$10	1	AUS$5.50		
Pop Tarts	M-O	Economic: Pop Music	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£9.99 per year		
Premier League	M-O	Sport: Soccer	BOU	e, p	£8.00 per season	0	£6.00/month		
Prims's Inter Pares	C-F	Power: Historical	INT	p	£10.00	1	£1.60		
Pro Soccer	C-F	Sport: Soccer	OLY	p	Free	5	£1.00		
Prometheus	C-O	Wargame	HKM	p	£10.00	0	£2.10	(d)	
Puma	C-O	Sport: Cricket	BUR	e, p	£4.00	0	Free		
Quest	M-O	Adventure	KJC	p	Free	1	£2 for 10		
Quest Online	M-O	Adventure	KJC	w	Free	5	£3.00		
Raceplan Grand Prix	C-O	Sport: Motor Racing	McC	p	£5.00	0	£1.75		
Reality Racing	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	DRE	p	Free	0	$2.90	(c)	
Renaissance	M-O	Power: Historical	XAN	e	$5	10	£2.50		
Riddle of the Sands	M-O	Power: Historical	SIL	p	£20.00	3	$4		
Riftlords	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	p	No	5	£5.00 for 4	(c)	
Rugby League Breakout	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	e, p	£5.00	2	£8.00 for 4		
Rugby League Stats	C-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	e	£5.00	0	£8.00 for 4		
Rugby Union Stats	H-O	Sport: Rugby	McC	p	£5.00	3	£11.00 for 4		
Run Chase	H-O	Sport: Cricket	SOF	p	£5.00	5	£9.99 per year		
S/F	C-F	Sci Fi	RCW	e, p	Free	0	£4.45	(c)	
S-League, The	C-O	Sport: Soccer	SPO	w	£5.00	3	£4.00		
Saturnalia: Exile	C-O	RPG: Fantasy	HAQ	e, p	£5.00	5	£4.00		
Saturnalia: NE	C-O	RPG: Fantasy	DWG	p	£10.00	0	£3.00		
Saturnalia: S	C-O	RPG: Fantasy	TFT	p	£10.00	0	£4.50		
Slamdunk	H-O	Sport: Ice Hockey	HAR	p	£5.00	3	£4.50	(c)	
Slapshot	M-O	Sci-Fi	INC	p	£5.00	5	£5.00		
Smuggler's Run	C-O	Sport: Soccer	MIN	p	£5.00	5	£2.00		
Soccer Stats	C-O	Sport: Soccer	McC	e, p	£5.00	5	£3.00		
Soccer Strategy	C-O	Sci Fi	ABM	p	£10.00	3	£5.00		
Space Troopers	C-O	RPG: Fantasy	OAT	e, p	£5.00	0	£0.50		
Spaceplan II	C-O	Sci Fi	SOF	p	Free	3	£8.00 for 4		
Speculate II	C-F	Economic	SOF	e, p	£5.00	5	£8.00 for 4		
Star Chase	C-F	Sci-Fi	PAG	p	£5.00	5	£9.00 for 4		
StarFleet Warlord	C-F	Sci-Fi	FBI	e	£3.00	5	£2.50	(a)	
Starweb	M-O	Misc: Robots	FAR	e	Free	3	Free		
Tartarus	?	Wargame: Fantasy	TDI	F only	?	0	1 Euro		
Tatanka	M-O	Wargame: Fantasy	TOT	e	1 Euro	-	£1.00		
Total Conquest	C-O	Sport: Soccer	BUR	e, p	£4.00	6	£2.50		
TOTL	C-O	Sport: Soccer	GBM	e, p	Free	?	£2.50		
Tough At The Top	H-O	Tribal	RZE	p	Free	5	£1.80	(d)	
Tribe Net	C-F	RPG: Fantasy	RCW	e	£0.70	?	£0.70	(d)	
Vitriol	C-F	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	p	Free	3	Free		
War of Wizards	M-O	Wargame: Fantasy	WWG	p	$1.40	5	$1.40		
War of Wizards	M-F	Wargame	KJC	p	£3.00	5	£2.20		
Warlord	C-F	RPG: Western	CRA	e, p	£25.00	0	£5.95		
Peldere	H-O	Misc	RCW	e, p	n/a	3	£2.50		
Wild World Web	M-O	Sport: Horse Racing	GLO	p	£25.00	10	£9.99 per year		
Winning Post	C-F	Wargame	SSV	e	?	3	n/a		
World Conquest	C-O	War: C20th	SOF	p	£5.00	4	4.50 Euro	(a)	
World Empires	M-F	Power: Historical	AGM	e, p	£5.00	3	£2.00		
World War I Battles	C-F	Wargame	PAG	p	£10.00	2	£3.00		
World War IV	C-F	RPG: Fantasy	AND	p	£4.00	4	£4.00	(d)	
Worlds Apart	H-O	Wargame	PAG	p	£5.00	3	£2.00	(d)	
WW IV Blitz	C-F	Wargame	PAG	e, p	£5.00	3	£1.50		
WW IV H2H	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DUN	p	£10.00	3	£4.00		
Xott	H-O	RPG: Fantasy	DUN	p	£10.00	2	£2.50		
Xott Solo									

Meets & Conventions

GAMES GAMES GAMES DAYS: Monthly games days hosted by SFC Press at *The Duke of York, 35 New Cavendish St, London W1* from 12.30 onwards. Admission is free. Contact SFC Press, Old Dover Road, London SE3 8SJ; email *events@sfcp.co.uk*.

SEPTEMBER

COLOURS, UK 2003: September 14th and 15th at the *Hexagon, Reading, Berks*. Trade stands (over 50!), demonstrations by reenactment societies and participation games. The show hosts one of the biggest wargame championships in the UK, as well as a painting and modelling competition.

http://www.colours.org.uk/

CASTLECON '03: 19th-26th September and 26th September-3rd October, a self-catering gaming holiday, for up to 16 gamers per week, in *Wales*. Cost will be around £120 per person per week. Write to Steve Jones, 59 Sudeley Walk, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8JH, or telephone 01234-405878.

USURPER CON 03: September 27, 2003 in the *Jury's Inn Hotel, Wellesley Road, Croydon, Surrey*. Organised by Croydon RPG Club and including roleplaying games, wargames, cardgames and more. They are aiming the convention at students and new gamers, but there's plenty that's new for experienced RPGers too. Discounts for prebooking.

http://www.usurpercon.co.uk

OCTOBER

AHIKS (The Avalon Hill Inter-Continental Kreigspiel Society) AUTUMN CONVENTION: 8th, 9th and 10th October 2003 at the *Dukes Head Hotel, Wallington, Surrey*. Strictly gaming for fun, visitors welcome. Games will be all board games from heavy to light. Always some 18XX plus the more general German type games. Emphasis on fun games, more often multi-player. If you want to play it, there's bound to be someone to play against. Please contact Chris Geggus on:

chris@geggus99.freeserve.co.uk

AGSCoN 3: 18th October at the University of Kent at Canterbury. From 9.30am, with an entry fee of £2. RPG demos, CCGs such as L5R, Warlord, A Game of Thrones and Doomtown, Mechwarrior, and an interactive WWII demo game from Herne Bay Wargamers. Traders, a charity raffle and bring & buy stall; all proceeds go to the RNLI (last year they raised £146).

http://cgn.org.uk/

SPIEL '03: 23rd-26th October, *Essen, Germany*. The biggest games fair in Europe, presenting games of all kinds and toys from around the world. Last year there were 148,000 visitors and 573 exhibitors from 21 nations, with plenty of media coverage for the event. Yes, it's vast! Details from:

http://www.merz-verlag.com/

NOVEMBER

GENCON EUROPE SPELLEN SPEKTAKEL: exact date TBA, in *Amsterdam*.

WARFARE 2003: 15th-16th November at the *Rivermead Leisure Complex, Richfield Avenue, Reading, Berkshire*. Traders, demonstration/participation games, competition games and a 'massive' bring & buy.

http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/drive/gdo75/gdo75/

MIDCON: mid-November (exact date TBA) at *Birmingham City Thistle Hotel*. A general boardgames convention held annually since 1980. Attendance around 120-160 people, mostly boardgamers. The convention hosts the National Diplomacy Championships. Details from Midcon, Not Just Stamps, 17 Crendon Street, High Wycombe HP13 6LJ.

midcon@sfcp.co.uk
www.sfcp.co.uk/Events/Midcon/index.htm

FANTASYCON2003: 21st-23rd November.
http://www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk/info/fantasycon.htm
http://www.britishfantasysociety.org.uk/downloads/Dealer.doc

THE TORCH OF FREEDOM: 28th-30th November at the *West Retford Hotel, Retford*. A free-form roleplaying event running from 8pm on the Friday to lunchtime Sunday. Costs and accommodation details on the website:
http://www.flar.demon.co.uk/torchoffreedom/index.htm
steve@flar.demon.co.uk

DECEMBER

GENCON SoCaL: 11th-14th December at the Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, California USA.
http://www.gencon.com

DRAGONMEET: 13th December at *Kensington Town Hall*. Further details TBA.

APRIL 2004

TOWERCON 2004: April 2nd-4th, *Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool*.
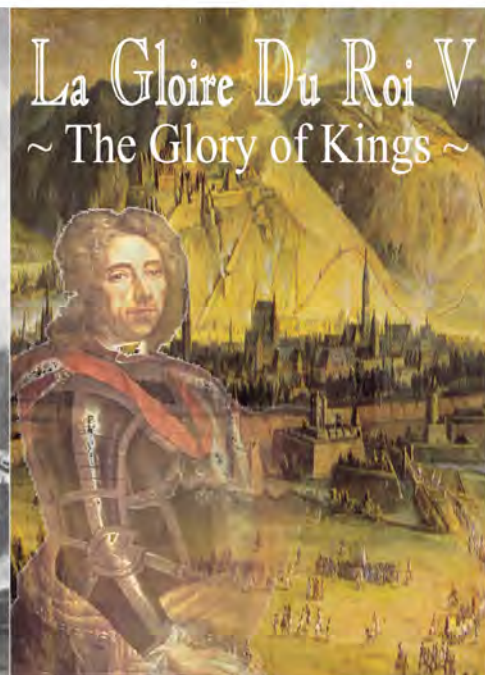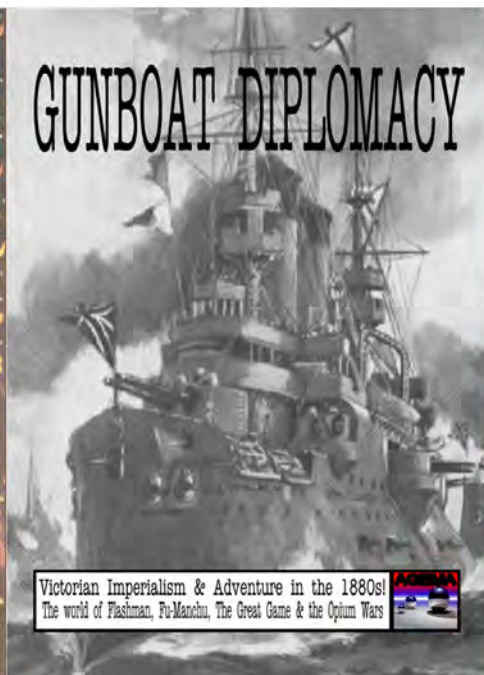*www.towercon.co.uk*

JULY 2004

CONTINUUM 2004: 23rd-26th July at *Digby Hall, Leicester*. Further details TBA.

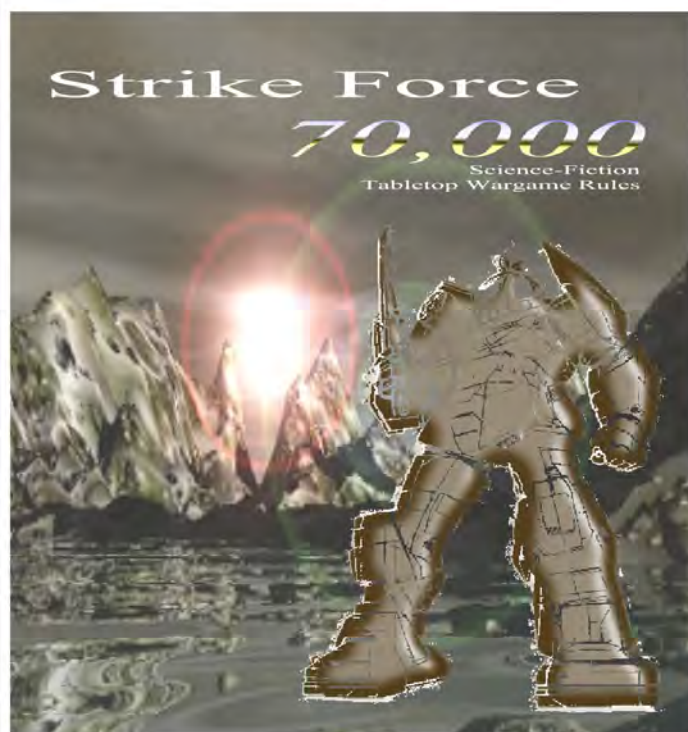**Flagship welcomes news of any games-related convention**