

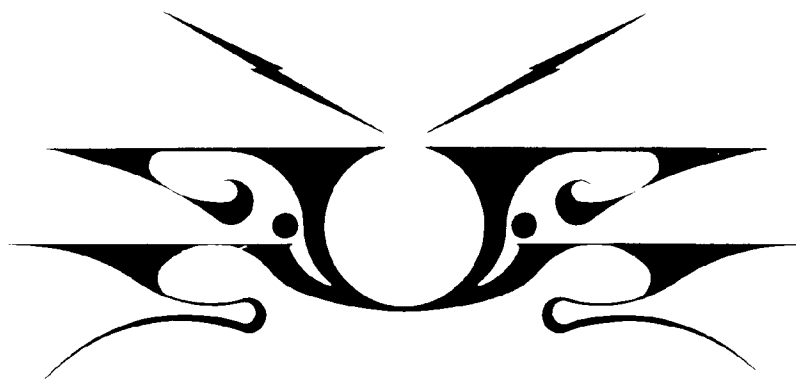
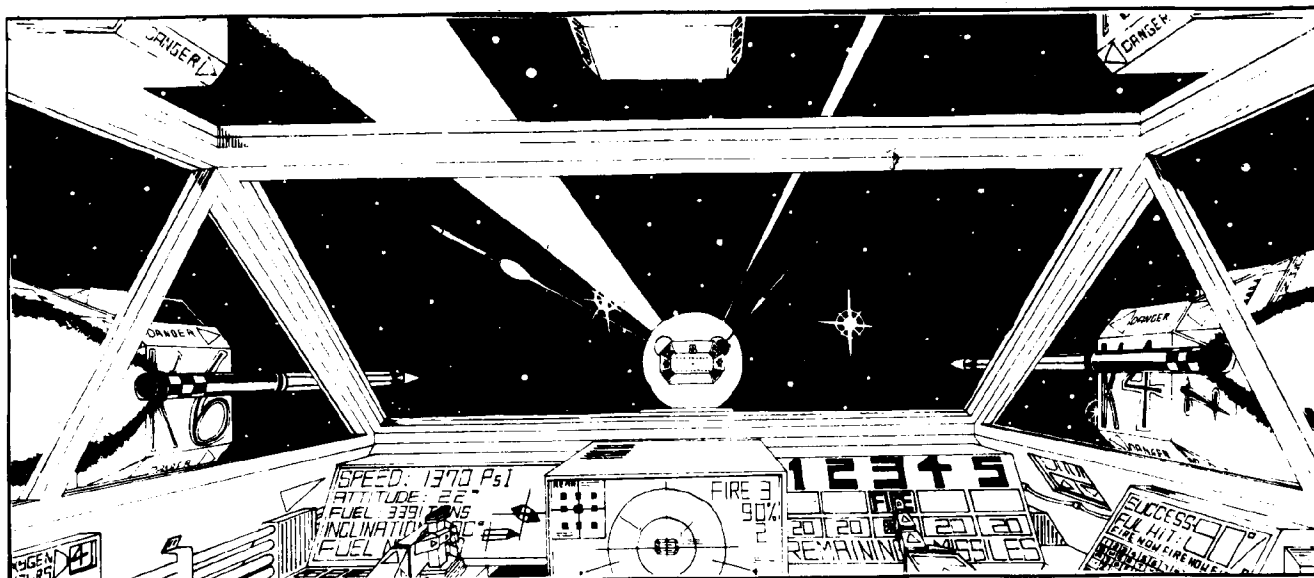
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THE MAGAZINE OF POSTAL GAMING

FLAGSHIP



ISSUE 2



STARLORD

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

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STARLORD costs £1-25 and has no hidden extras or deposits to pay. In fact, new players get the rules and first print-out free! If you think you've got what it takes to conquer the galaxy, you can be entered in a game immediately for just £1-25. Cheques to 'STARLORD' please. No SAE is required - simply write to:-

REPORT FROM THE BRIDGE

I HAD a call the other day from a well-known zine editor who had just received the first issue of FLAGSHIP. Yes, he thought he'd try a professional PBM game now, but 'frankly, I've always felt they were a bit of a rip-off: three or four times the price of an amateur zine, just for a single printout!' We went on to talk about his own postal fantasy campaign, and he said that it had been suspended for some time, unfortunately: he'd been too busy at work.

Well, yes. That's one reason why there is a place for the professional game. If you play a game in a zine, you are in effect asking the editor to give up a weekend or more every month to you for the duration of the game, which may be two or three years, and to do it for nothing except the personal satisfaction which it gives him. If, a year hence, just as the game is getting interesting, he finds that he has other pressing commitments or that he is simply fed up with editing, you don't really have a reasonable complaint: he was always doing you a favour, and he's decided to stop. Too bad.

By contrast, the professional gamesmaster is dependent on you for a significant part of his income, perhaps even for all of it. He can't allow himself to be fed up with giving you quick replies to your orders, since you may get fed up with *him* and take your custom to Lightning Games over the road. Nor can he neglect the need to ensure that his games are attractively presented and constantly improved to keep up with the latest ideas in the hobby. A zine editor can try out a half-baked design on his readers, and give up when it proves not to work satisfactorily: if a professional GM did this, his reputation would never recover – FLAGSHIP would see to that!

On the other hand, the amateur branch of the hobby does offer things which the professionals cannot, apart from low cost. The freedom to experiment with new ideas, half-baked or not, gives many zines an exuberant creativity missing from well-finished professional designs. Moreover, the players have a much better chance of getting their ideas incorporated into the game, as well as stamping their mark on the zine with press releases and personal exchanges in the letter column.

Conversely, the fact that professional game fees are mostly pretty reasonable compared with other forms of entertainment – would you rather have a printout giving an hour's fascinating study, or less than half the cost of a cinema ticket? – doesn't mean that all the games are worth their cost. This is why FLAGSHIP (unlike most magazines) provides a price survey in Galactic View and includes value-for-money considerations in its reviews.

We believe that the amateur and professional wings of PBM gaming complement each other, and it is one of FLAGSHIP's primary objectives to build bridges between them. If you've only tried one, isn't it time you sampled the other?

Leading features this time include the megagame Starmaster, with all its intricate subgames brought under the spotlight, the simple and fast-moving Vorcon Wars, and the extraordinary Terra II – a fantasy game run entirely by computer. Isn't that a contradiction in terms? Turn to page 8 and find out!

NICKY PALMER

WRITE FOR FLAGSHIP

FLAGSHIP welcomes contributions! Articles and artwork should be submitted to the editor; articles should be typed double-spaced. To avoid disappointment, you may like to write first to check that your theme has not already been done by someone else. Material which cannot be used will be returned if a self-addressed envelope is provided (no stamp necessary). Printed material will be paid for at a minimum rate of \$9.00/£6 per 1000 words or per drawing. We also need reviewers to play new games and review them for FLAGSHIP: usually they will get these games *free*.



No. 2

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CONTENTS

Report from the Bridge	3
<i>Explorer's Findings</i>	
Starmaster – the megagame	4
Terra II	8
Vorcon Wars	11
<i>Professional Secrets</i>	
Things I wish I'd known about	
Vorcon Wars	12
Directions for new Crane operators	14
The Amateur Scene	16
The Sopwith Revival	18
<i>Ghost in the Machine</i>	
A Choice of Ghosts	19
The future of PBM	21
Buying hardware for your own PBM game	22
<i>Travellers' Tales</i>	
Gamestart Alpha Victory	24
Exchange article: PBM UNIVERSAL	26
THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK	28
THE MIGHTY PEN	29
GALACTIC VIEW	30

Subscriptions – p. 28

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The ultimate game experience or an expensive disaster? NICKY PALMER reports on the controversial megagame

STARMASTER

THE virtues of Starmaster are immediately apparent. Indeed, the setup turn is perhaps the most seductive in PBM gaming: your first task is to design your own species! After that, you proceed to construct your home world, endowing it with varying climate and terrain and choosing a suitable atmosphere. You are then ready to try out your creation in a stupendous power struggle across a gigantic galaxy (166,803 cubic sectors) with the possibility of later invasions of other galaxies. On the way, you will be immersed in numerous subgames:

- exploration
- colonization
- political negotiation with neutrals
- trade
- construction and technological research

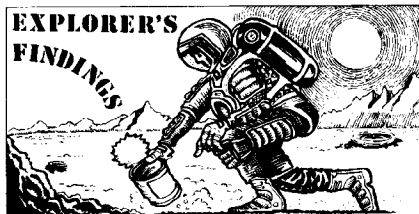
... each of which has extensive rules and sophisticated touches of realism which you can only find out by experience. Add to this the usual business of negotiations with other players and the forming of interspecies alliances and you have a feast of possibilities which promises to be the ultimate game experience. In practice, Starmaster falls somewhat short of this, but it is still in many ways unique.

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

To take things in order, let's start by looking at the setup. Species design and homeworld are interrelated, since your species is going to need to thrive in its home environment, but in practice the main impact of world selection on the species will be on breathing and food supply: if you provide an atmosphere and terrain rather more hospitable than permanent ice, you should have a good deal of freedom in choosing your physical form.

You have 300 Biological Points to play with, and can spend them on features from an extensive list, an extract from which appears in the Table.

Note that there are a number of aspects not shown here for space reasons, and there are further choices for those which are shown. Speaking broadly, your design comes down to a choice between physical toughness and flexibility on the one hand, and mental ability on the other. However, you have the interesting option of dividing up into several castes, each with a separate design specialising in one aspect. The penalty for this is that each caste has not 300 point but 300 minus 20 times the number of castes. Only one caste is allowed



EXTRACT OF STARMASTER SPECIES DESIGN

<i>Outer covering</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Skin	0
Fur, feathers	2
Clear crystal armour	3
Chitinous armour (like lobster)	5
<i>Locomotion</i>	
Leg, no joints	2 per yard of limb
Tentacle	8 first yd, +3 per ft
Pair of wings	25 for 36-inch wingspan
Self-teleportation between planets	170
<i>Defences other than armour</i>	
Teeth	2 per mouth
Fangs	5 per mouth
Tail	10 per yard
<i>Bodily posture</i>	
Sprawl (no skeleton)	0
Semi-upright	7
Vertical	10
<i>Ingestion/digestion</i>	
Vampiric or osmosis	5
Herbivorous	15
Photosynthesis	30
<i>Respiration</i>	
Air cavities (like insect)	7 per cavity system
Lungs	10
<i>Sight</i>	
Black/white-vision eye	5 +3 per further eye
Colour and infra-red	15 +9 per further eye
<i>Special abilities</i>	
Density perception	10 for internal eye
Radiation perception	10 for internal eye
<i>Intellect</i>	
Basic	5
Obedience	15
Initiative	45
Telepathy	90
Hypnosis	105
Psionic power	120

to have Initiative among its intellectual attributes, and that must also have Psionic power with which to control the others. I chose this option, with four castes: apart from the controlling caste, I had breeders (the only one with a reproductive system, reasonably robust but few other abilities), workers (extremely tough) and tool-users (very feeble, with just one arm and a digit to press buttons, but teleportation powers). The leaders and workers would colonise new worlds, setting up installations for the tool users to teleport into, saving transport facilities and giving the ability to reinforce threatened positions quickly. This proved quite useful, but seriously deficient when I came into conflict with a species which had specialised in physical strength: despite considerable technological superiority, we were totally unable to defeat them in hand-to-hand fighting.

Turning to home world design, the choice is between size and sophistication: the larger your home, the more production you will have, but the more backward your technology is likely to be, especially in ground combat ability: the slightly dubious explanation is that you will have needed to concentrate your efforts on space research in order to escape your monstrous gravity.

The choice of starting positions is one of the most fascinating aspects of the game, and one which gives the player a real feeling of involvement in his species, but it also gives rise to the first major criticism of Starmaster: that it is unbalanced. God is on the side of the big battalions in this game. True, the small world will start with useful technological advantages, but in the long haul these will dwindle into insignificance, while the remorseless thunder of the big-world production lines overwhelms the puny efforts of the minnows. This isn't to say that you can't be successful with a small world, but you start at a significant disadvantage. This has been recognised by the moderators, who have introduced various new advantages for small home worlds: whether this has restored precise balance must remain doubtful. Moreover, the UK and (especially) the US games have been running for some time, and new players will find that they are much weaker than the existing powers, some of which could squash them with minimal effort if they chose. This is a phenomenon also familiar in Tribes of Crane (see the separate article in this issue on Crane). The counter-argument

Get started in STARMASTER
with a FLAGSHIP discount
See page 18

is that it is really pretty stupid to try and win Starmaster anyway: imagine just constructing a map of 166,803 sectors, let alone controlling them all! Starmaster is essentially a role-playing game, and if you are content to build up your society, in the knowledge that there are bigger fish around, you can have a very good time: the probability of being squashed at an early stage is not very great, simply because space is vast and malevolent superpowers few.

PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY

Having establishing your base, your thoughts will turn to exploration, first of your home system, then of the big unknown around you. First you need to build spaceships and military units. You start with separate technological levels in Aerospace, Ground Military, and Industrial departments. The better your industrial technology, the more use you will be able to make of your production facilities; the other levels determine the power of the units which you can construct, each increase giving you more bang for your buck. During the early stages, technological increases are mostly obtained by good luck (finding artifacts) and bright ideas (wargames, military reorganization, orbital solar energy collectors, and many more), and more industrial levels produce new discoveries – better weapons, faster spaceship engines – making the early Special Actions a rewarding task. After level 50, the pace of innovation slows down, and before long you break through to Second Generation industry, with which you can improve technology with the proceeds of trade.

Production surges out of the factories every turn in the American game, giving an incentive to make plenty of moves; in the British game, production was originally on a monthly schedule, but now appears more frequently, with small worlds having the chance to build more often than their more cumbersome rivals. In theory, you can pay the fee for a production plan once and then let it run indefinitely; in practice, this will leave an increasing share of capacity unused, since your technology will keep improving and increasing your productive power. A reasonable compromise is probably to let your plan run for three or four turns before upgrading to new heights of output.

EXPLORATION

We still haven't done anything, have we? Next step is to explore. Here it pays heavily to be quick off the mark, and if you can afford to send out more than the basic six star fleets ('forces') you should do so: I started off with no fewer than 30, gaining a rich harvest in discoveries. The first player to find a neutral world stands to gain heavily from alliance or conquest, and even unpopulated worlds (the majority) are sometimes littered with debris of more advanced civilisations which will repay study. Standard exploration procedure is to move your forces at top speed in a systematic search pattern around your home system with instructions to SCAN/STOP: if they run into a star system they

The image shows several overlapping forms from the Starmaster game. The most prominent is the 'TRADE ACTIVITY SHEET' which includes a table for tracking trade orders. Below it are forms for 'HOME PLANET PRODUCTION CALCULATION' and 'HOME PLANET PRODUCTION IMPLEMENTATION'. At the bottom is a 'PLAYER-NEUTRAL DIPLOMACY TURN SHEET' with columns for location, empire name, and diplomatic level.

MOVEMENT FROM/TO System, Planet, Block	ORDERS In Transit/Upon Arrival	Action	Item Type	Quantity	E.U. Exchange
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
TOTAL E.U. BALANCE					
					FOR TRADING

will stop and have a look at it (once you are moving eight sectors a turn it may be better to just SCAN, yielding eight searches a turn: if they see a system you can follow up with another, slower, force to explore it).

Once you find a system, you can do an orbital scan to review the full range of planets, followed by either (cautious option) a planet map and a subsequent landing or (reckless option) a 'blind' landing. About one in four blind landings will be lost in the sea, but on balance it is probably sensible to opt for these, rather than spend time and money mapping what may prove to be a totally useless planet.

COLONIZATION

About 90% of worlds will be unpopulated, and if the atmosphere, terrain and gravity remind you of the good ol' home world you should be able to colonize them: note that the sun type will tell you roughly with experience what sort of worlds to expect in the system (e.g. White Dwarf suns have very big worlds while Yellow Subdwarf suns should turn up some earth-like planets). Species design seems to play an important role in your colonies' survival chances – as of course it should – since all the players I have met have had different

experiences, some getting 100% attrition on even slightly different worlds, others proving robust in positively hostile environments. My own settlers proved the toughest of all, perhaps reflecting the advantages of caste specialization: I never encountered attrition at all within a considerable range of planets settled, and soon had more colonies than I knew what to do with.

The initial purpose of colonies is to trade with the player's home world (or those of allies) – see below – though you can gradually build them up to industrial status, giving you a base for exploration in the region (spaceship attrition, by Pirates, Light-eaters, etc., is higher if far from a base) and a possible bolt-hole if your home world is overrun. Colonies which are exploited too far will revolt, and a useful Special Action is to establish a democratic interworld council to give warnings of dissatisfaction before this happens.

TRADE

Home worlds differ from colonies in the obvious way – more industry, fewer raw materials – and you can achieve huge profits by trading between them, starting with very profitable bulk goods (e.g. food)

please turn over

STARMASTER

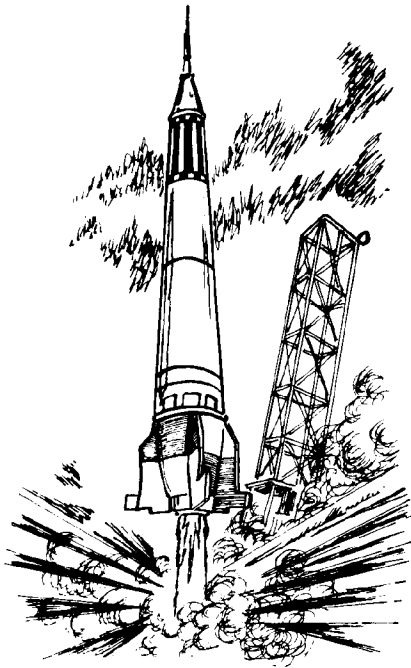
continued from page 5

and working up to more portable but expensive commodities. Trade prices are obviously rolled on some table by the moderator, and if you have ten or so colonies you should have reached the extreme values on the table, with little further benefit from further settlement (though a very large network of colonies does give more diplomatic clout when talking to neutrals). Trade with other players should also be considered, psionic caste systems having significantly different prices from the others. Most profitable of all may be trade with neutrals, some of whom have very remarkable tastes: I was lucky enough to find a world with an insatiable appetite for my home world art, willing to pay stupendous prices for trinkets knocked up in our cellars at trivial cost. The trouble is that you need to work hard to get the neutral to the stage of a trade pact. by ...

DIPLOMACY

During your initial setup, you choose a political ideology, from a list whose explanatory notes possibly betray some curious ideas of the designer himself: you can be a democracy ('as in the United States'), or a republic ('as in ... England'), or socialist ('a watered-down Stalinism') or various other familiar concepts with controversial descriptions. These are arranged on two scales, left to right and 'authoritarian' to 'free', and your initial relationship with any neutral cultures which you encounter will normally depend on proximity to one scale or the other. A Barbarian culture, for example, will get along quite well with a Monarchy, since both have essentially weak central powers and strong autonomous sub-leaders.

Whatever level you start at, you can attempt to improve it by assiduous negotiation, proposing a succession of pacts from the simple exchange of ambassadors right up to total merger, with the neutral power being operated by you as a second home world. Since this involves the expense of playing two positions, you may prefer to stop at a trade pact. The basic diplomatic system is rather mechanical, each possible proposal costing a certain number of diplomatic points (which are awarded to you according to your empire size and previous contacts with neutrals), but you can ginger it up with imaginative special actions as usual.



COMBAT

After all that, it comes almost as an unwelcome distraction to encounter another player, but there are of course considerable rewards in the exchange of information and technology: in keeping with my aggressive plans, I attacked the first player I met, but he bought me off with the very useful promise of training my ground forces up to his level from the pathetic 19th-century technology with which my big home world started. There is so much to do on your own in Starmaster that negotiation is not as important as in, say, Starweb, or indeed as in Tribes of Crane, but new players should seek an experienced patron to accelerate them through the early stages of research, and an alliance of different equals can reinforce each other in combat.

Each battle can be ordered with elaborate tactical instructions: 'send in light cruisers first as a screen for drones with nuclear warheads designed to ram the enemy; then follow up with the main battle fleet firing in line' would be a perfectly normal set of instructions using one special action. Both sides usually take some casualties, since (as in Tribes of Crane) higher technology curiously improves attack but not defence strength. Since each combat results in a hefty fee in real money, many players tend to avoid it when they can.

OVERALL VIEW

The game is perhaps the most expensive on offer today if you want to pursue an active role: the basic turn fee of \$3.50/£1.50 includes 6 forces, 0 special actions, 0 production, 0 diplomacy, 0 trade, and 0 combat, and if you are working in all modules you will certainly end up spending three times as much on each turn. It is highly dependent on good GMing (see 'A Choice of Ghosts'), unbalanced in game terms, and grossly biased to rich players, who can run several empires and concentrate the economic yield from all their trade on one (in the UK, they will be started sufficiently close together for them even to enact an agreed looting of one by the other). Nor does it in the long run quite fulfil its promise in the early turns. Despite all this, the game gave me more pleasure than any game previously, and I've been playing wargames for 18 years: the first turns of exploration and innovation are sheer delight for anyone with the willingness to identify with the species he has created, and even the discovery of the surviving and hugely powerful Elder Races (run as player empires in the American game and hence potentially very dangerous, but much less dangerous neutrals in the UK game) failed to blunt my enthusiasm for building up my Sinuate Brotherhood to a significant force in galactic affairs. If you find this sort of game attractive, I recommend the following strategy:

- (1) Choose a medium-sized home world, not so small as to be a pushover, nor so large as to be really hard work to run
- (2) Pursue an active role for the first dozen turns or so, aiming at second-generation industry, a good network of colonies, and contact with a couple of other players
- (3) Settle for a low-level commitment or in the longer term

What about a Starmaster II to start all players off equal again, and improve the weaknesses of the game? The first demand is occasionally met by the opening of a new galaxy, but as far as I know there are no plans for the latter. On the other hand, Schubel's new Global Supremacy (not yet available from Mitregames due to computer limitations) bears marked resemblances in design to Starmaster (though set on earth without the SF aspect). This hasn't been running for long enough to give it a fair review, but in a future FLAGSHIP we'll see how it compares with its brilliant predecessor with feet in clay. ●



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Do open-ended role-playing games need a human moderator to bring them to life?

JOHN REES introduces the 100% computer-moderated game of tribal odyssey . . .

TERRA II

THE cold bites into your face as you leave the wagon and mount your horse. This will be the final check that all is accounted for, before your tribe departs for warmer climates. The village has been stripped of valuables and possessions, and the animals divided between the resident tribes. It is now your job to guide your followers to safety.

Terra II is the second PBM game by Jon Clemens (the others being Universe II and the latest Conquest of Insula II, which is a battle-oriented limited variant of Terra II). Like Universe II, Terra II is an alternative world to our own. At the start, you are a tribal leader just as your village has decided to move from North to South or vice versa (depending on your current hemisphere).

The world is divided into hexes 10 miles across for easy movement notation (e.g. N, SW). Each hex has a predominant terrain which you learn on first entry, and this terrain will impose an appropriate movement cost from your total turn allowance. There is a realistic range of terrain types from 'High snow-covered mountains' through 'Desert' to 'Open sea', with many gradations in between (22 types in all). You may move mounted or on foot, depending on the number of horses taken by your tribe; mounted movement is 50% faster.

Before you start the game you will receive a start-up sheet, on which you design your tribe. The rationale here is that the village is too big to travel as one unit, so it has been split up into several tribes, each having a choice of what it wanted. The choice is represented by a points system: you have 2000 points to start with, each available resource costing a certain number of points (see illustration). This design flexibility gives a nice touch of individualism rare in computer-moderated games. As shown in the illustration, you also have the chance to specify your flag and shield design and warrior uniform.

Newcomers are deliberately left in the dark about the different values of the alternatives, and it may be most fun for each individual to make an independent choice. However, a few notes may be useful. Cattle gives more provisions per cost point than goats (being somewhat larger!), but they are less resistant to harsh climates and may be unable to reproduce as fast as you eat them. Reproduction is fairly leisurely: my herd of 60 horses, for example, increased by one per turn.

Secondly, great speed is rarely necessary in the early stages, so you may find it better to buy horses only for cavalry, or even have

no horses at all, rather than to equip the whole tribe; the saving could usefully be used in increasing the number of warriors.

Thirdly, think twice before investing in iron and coal. If you are planning to use these for weapon-making, forget it. It is cheaper to get ready-made weapons, and you will have more urgent skills than weapon-making to develop in the early part of the game (see discussion of skills below).

Once the setup has been processed, you will receive the following each turn: a turn sheet, any diplomatic messages, and three data input cards (for movement and activities; trade and transfers; and combat troop dispositions). For those of you

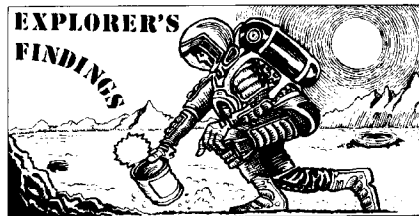
unfamiliar with these cards, they are covered with small boxes which have to be shaded according to instructions in the rulebook for each action that you take (see illustration). These save data entry costs and avoid transcription errors, since they are directly readable by the computer, but they can be tedious for the player, who has to look up the binary code for 735 rather than write the number directly. Personally I regard this as acceptable in view of the game's many virtues. The rules detailing the alternative entries are generally quite clear, with an index covering most things that a tribe might want to do, though you may get tired of the rather uninspired cover artwork.

The turn sheet report is entirely in narrative style (i.e. no codes to work out!) which is a pleasant change from, for instance, Starweb. But there is a problem, even with this system: the scribe appears to have a very limited vocabulary, and the journey seems to become very monotonous with my tribe constantly passing through 'A FLAT EXPANSE OF TUNDRA. PATCHES OF VEGETATION WERE SCATTERED . . .' (Universe II players who are always being told 'YOU SEE MANY ASTEROIDS' will recognise the feeling). The same is unfortunately true of combat reports. It shouldn't be too difficult for someone at Clemens & Associates to sit down and think of a great many more variations for each terrain type and combat situation. (Hint) Come on guys. But however sarcastic one is about the narration, it is still superior to 'coded' reports.

What you get on your printout is as follows:

- i) Time and weather
- ii) Scouting reports
- iii) Result of 'Threat' (see below) from last turn
- iv) Tribal movement
- v) EITHER combat OR activities report
- vi) New Threat or Opportunity
- vii) Inventory of tribe

The scouting report mainly describes the terrain seen by your scouting party, but also includes any tribes seen or objects found. The 'Threat' or 'Opportunity' is about as close to the free-format Special Actions of human-moderated games as Terra II gets: each turn you are told of one of these, and offered five actions you can take, e.g. from the conservative 'let him go' to the rather more active 'kill him'. The Special Action is in fact one thing which I would like to see added to the game, as there is always something that players will want to do that is not covered by the rules.



INITIAL TRIBE INFORMATION

TRIBE NAME _____
 LEADER'S NAME _____
 FLAG/SHIELD PATTERN _____
 FIRST COLOR _____
 SECOND COLOR _____
 CHARGE _____
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ITEM	QUANTITY	POINTS
PEOPLE	----- X 10 =	-----
CATTLE	----- X 6 =	-----
HORSES	----- X 8 =	-----
GOATS	----- X 2 =	-----
WAGONS	----- X 10 =	-----
SPEARS	----- X 4 =	-----
SWORDS	----- X 8 =	-----
BOWS	----- X 4 =	-----
AXES	----- X 6 =	-----
SHIELDS	----- X 8 =	-----
HELMETS	----- X 6 =	-----
FODDER (UNITS)	----- X 1 =	-----
IRON (LB.)	----- X 2 =	-----
COAL (LB.)	----- X 1 =	-----
BARRELS	----- X 2 =	-----
ROPE	----- X 1 =	-----
TOTAL POINTS =		-----

Tribal movement reports are identical in type to scouting reports.

Combat and activity reports are mutually exclusive, since combat diverts your tribe from anything else. The activities are vital to any tribe, since these include tending its herds, hunting, quarrying, mining, building, making weapons, and half a dozen more (of which three may be conducted per turn, each with a number of men determined by the player). The success of these activities is governed by the appropriate skills (herding, mining, and so on) of the tribespeople, and these can be increased as the game progresses. One skill may be improved per turn, but there is a chance of the improvement failing to be achieved which increases as more advanced levels of the skill are taught. A neat touch is that reaching the highest level in a skill allows you to conduct research into it (another parallel with Universe II) with the possibility that you will discover something that no other tribe can do. An example might be a primitive knowledge of gunpowder weapons. However, reaching the top level of a skill takes a *long* time. The most urgent priority for skill development is, in my view, scouting, once level 1 skill in herding has been achieved. This is because scouting gives you the chance of finding practically anything covered by the other skills: food, weapons, armour, metals, recruits, gems . . .

Of course, one must defend one's tribe, and this is done quite separately from activities. First the leader specifies the number of infantry and cavalry that will be used, then the weapon(s) used by each,

the battle tactic, archers, armour worn, heavy weapons deployed, and so on. This is in fact a realistic and complicated process which should be planned for when the tribe chooses its initial items. The complete control over tribal defences gives players the satisfying feeling that they are really leaders of their tribes, and certainly represents a vast improvement over the rather bland combat systems of Universe II and most other computer-moderated games.

The game has no 'end' as such, unless of course your tribe is totally destroyed. Nevertheless, each turn you receive will show a 'player rating' for your tribe based on possessions, skills, etc., so it is possible to compare your progress with other players.

Because there is no end, there is obviously no winner and therefore no set aim that a player must strive for. This causes some players to wander aimlessly and become bored, but with a slight exercise in imagination it should be easy to select an ambition for themselves such as setting up and successfully running a complete city, or forming and leading an

alliance of tribes.

Many players will probably be put off by their first few turns, as I was, because it is nearly inevitable that very little of importance will happen. This is similar to Universe II, in which the only way to get something out of the game is to immerse yourself in the politics and economics of the region (see Peter Kerridge's article in FLAGSHIP 1). Although both games have intricate and (especially in the case of Terra II) well-rounded rulebooks, there are very few real decisions to be made in the early turns. But if you are willing to wait until you encounter a couple of other players, and are ready to accept the data cards, then you should enjoy yourself.

I recommend this game with slight hesitation, mainly because I find that more happens and more information is gained per game turn in limited-duration fixed-deadline games like Starweb, but this offers a good open-ended game. As between Terra II and Universe II, try Terra II first: the advantages (more narrative, more useful control over your tribe) outweigh the disadvantage of no special actions.

ACTIVITY #17-DISTILLING

Five different types of beverages may be distilled at a village providing the skill level is high enough. Making ale requires a 'Distilling' skill level of two. Mead requires a skill level of four, wine a level of six, rum a level of eight, and brandy a level of nine.

The type of beverage you wish to distill is indicated on Card #1, line 72. The correct codes are shown below.

Ale	01	02	03	04
Mead	05	06	07	08
Wine	09	10	11	12
Rum	13	14	15	16
Brandy	17	18	19	20

Each two people assigned to distilling can produce one barrel of the specified beverage in each time period, providing the required ingredients are available. All beverages require that a barrel be available and, in all cases except wine, that water is available. Should the village be in an arid or desert sector, the water must be brought in from another sector. The following list specifies the additional ingredients required.

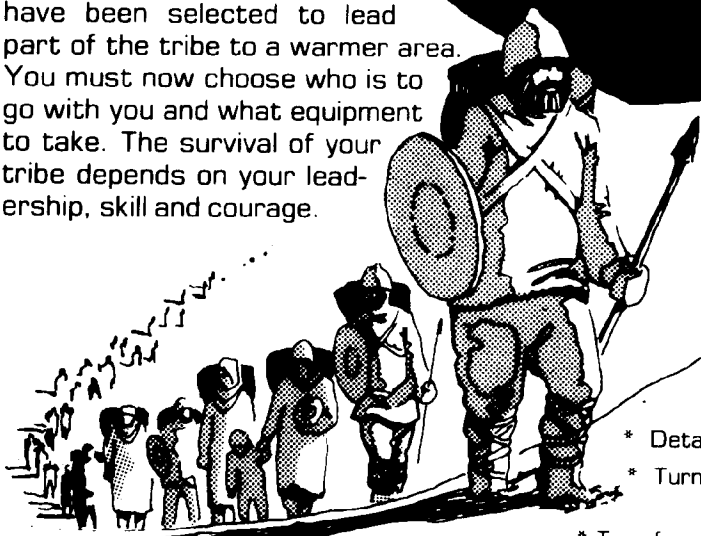
Ale:	100 pounds of grain
Mead:	50 pounds of honey
Wine:	100 pounds of grapes
Rum:	100 pounds of sugar cane
Brandy:	50 pounds of grapes and 50 pounds of sugar cane

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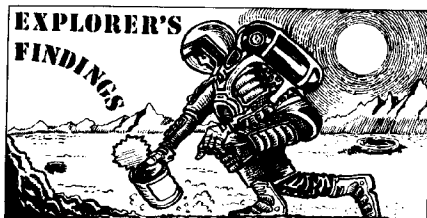


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Second generation Starlord? TIM LEWIS and WILLIAM McCARTHY introduce the hex-based game of planetary power struggle . . .

VORCON WARS

THE basic secret of Starlord's success is its neat presentation and crisp tactical choices: the player has a number of well-defined possibilities within a seven-'astral' radius of his command ship, and little influence on events outside this viewing range. Vorcon Wars offers a similar formula, this time based on a hexagon map (as in a board wargame); again, your actions are largely restricted to the area surrounding your commander, though Vorcon Wars offers significantly more possibilities in that area.

The scenario is that your spacecraft has landed on the planet of Vorcon that has just experienced the rather permanent demise of its oppressive ruler. While approaching Vorcon, you note with a sigh that 15 other craft are doing the same thing, no doubt with a view to challenging you for planetary control. You have a limited number of men to start with, and a distinct shortage of supplies to feed them; your first task is to establish an adequate agricultural base to stop your men deserting. While doing this, you will run into the local Vorcon inhabitants, who have the odd idea that its *their* agricultural base that you're after: these provide moderate opposition on each hex to tone you up for the coming encounter with the other players. As your area of control spreads, Vorcon citizens will begin to rally to your flag.

Each turn's printout shows the 19 hexes centred on your commander, including terrain type (18 varieties from the useful Rocket Bases to the frustrating impassable sea hexes), though fortification of a hex will obscure its type from your view (even if it is your own fortification, an irritating quirk forcing careful record-keeping). If you have a satellite – the launching of which requires a Rocket Base – currently in orbit, you will get details of any hostile forces in the area, and of the total force and weapon strength of any players whose commanders are in sight. The map is single-colour and therefore less pretty than Starlord's famous printouts, but apart from the fortification snag it works functionally well enough.

Combat, again like Starlord, is resolved using a battle matrix: each player chooses one of three strategies for each of his forces, determining how easily they will give up and retreat: the interaction between these strategies will influence the result of the battle, though the extent of the effect is secret. Thus, choosing to HOLD (accept 100% losses without retreat) is known to give an advantage over the attacking BATTLE strategy but the degree of the advantage can only be discovered by practice.

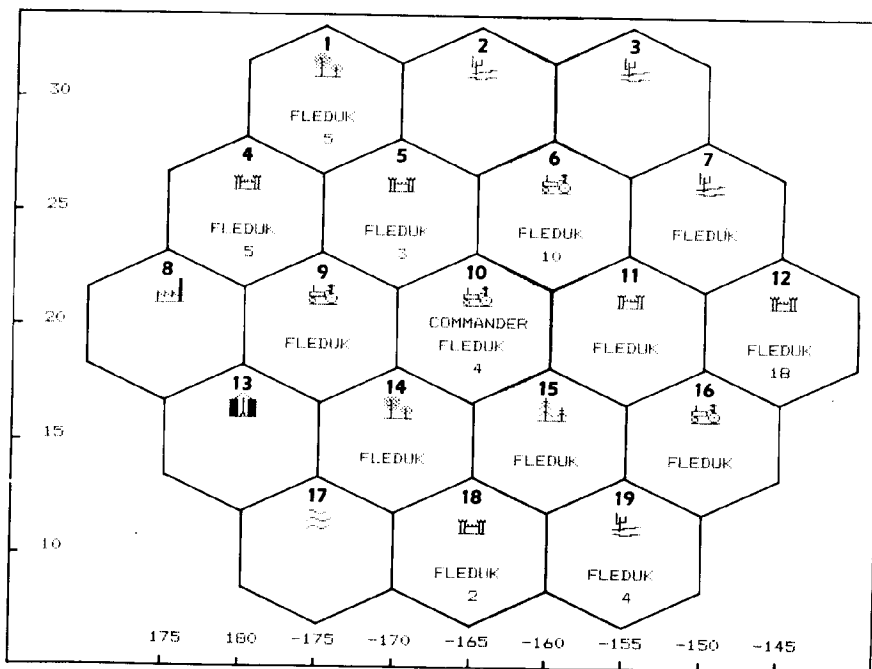
Where the game goes well beyond Starlord is in the range of options available; whereas most Starlord options are only

available at the location of the Commander, Vorcon Wars options can be applied to all 19 hexes, subject to available resources. Most options require industry and minerals (produced by mineral mines): examples are agricultural development, weapon manufacture, fortification, construction, minelaying and clearance (the former takes priority, giving a guaranteed kill of 50% of your opponent's men, if you can predict his point of attack), land reclamation and long-distance movement by transporter (like gate stars in Starlord, except that you build the transporters). Options worth special note are Trading and Missile Manufacture. The former is conducted with a GM-controlled Trader, who offers barter deals between all the commodities of the game; in particular, he offers the otherwise very scarce atomic ore (tip for players looking for atomic mines: due to environmental worries, the Vorcons try to put them in outlying areas...) Missile manufacture requires

five units of atomic ore, but if you can achieve this, it gives you a nuclear missile capable of wiping out one of your opponents.

You soon develop your own strategies, but the GM thoughtfully provides a sheet of useful hints for the beginner, including a sample orders sheet from a previous game annotated with comments on the situation shown by the printout. The GM is notably helpful to players asking questions about the game, though apart from trading prices everything is computer-moderated. The game is one of the most inexpensive on the market.

The only serious criticism which we have of the game – apart from the limits which the design of both Starlord and Vorcon Wars imposes on the player's options outside his immediate radius – is that many players take a long time to encounter opposition – about ten turns seems fairly typical. Vorcon seems to be a big place.



Commander FLEDUK's view for his VORCON WARS position. Hexes 2,3,8 and 13 are not controlled by FLEDUK (17 is a sea hex) and are therefore devoid of detail, since FLEDUK has no satellite. They might be full of enemy troops.

ANDREW BARTON wrote in **FLAGSHIP 1** on the principles of computer game design. Now he's back with tips on **Vorcon Wars** and a critical appraisal of the game.

Things I wish I'd known about **VORCON WARS**

THIS article is in two parts. The first part gives tips and ideas for playing **Vorcon Wars**. The second refers back to my article in **FLAGSHIP 1**, and looks at how the ideas I put forward there apply to the game.

An army marches on its stomach

John keeps saying in his newsletters that there should never be any need to starve your men – but it keeps happening! In the early stages the need to keep your men fed is one of the main limitations, especially as it is generally thought to be good play to sell rations to the trader on your opening turn.

One reason people fall into starvation is that the rules aren't entirely clear on the sequence of events. The list of event timings on page 22 leaves out a crucial detail: the men look to see if rations for two turns are available *after* you have fed them for the turn.

This means that to avoid desertions, you must have, at the beginning of your turn, twice as many rations as you expect to have men after the battles, allowing for new recruits and prisoners. Clearly there is a lot of scope for error here!

If you can see at the beginning of the turn, that you are heading for trouble there are three ways out:

- get more rations from the trader, if it is one of the turns he is present
- develop more agricultural hexes, if you are sure you can hold onto them
- move some men out of range. Note that this is only possible if your commander is moving in the opposite direction, or by using signal beacons.

Lebensraum

After the first couple of turns you can normally expand only by five hexes a turn. Until you run into other players, 30 or so men should be enough for this – provided you know the strength of the opposition! This is one advantage of an early satellite, since it will enable you to use the minimum number of men necessary to displace the Vorcons. There is *always* a Rocket Base within a short distance of your starting point.

It is wise to expand as fast and as far as possible in the early stages, even if this means you are not fully consolidated in your interior, so that when you meet the opposition you have already taken ground for which later you would have to pay a heavy price in blood. A good defence takes time to set up in this game, so put yourself in a position to trade space for time.

Another advantage of early expansion is that you may make contact with your neighbours before they are in touch with each other. Any player worth his salt can wring great diplomatic advantages from such a situation.

Knowledge is Power

In the early stages of a game like **Vorcon Wars** the new player has a lot of uncertainty about the rules and the most effective approach to the game. Later on he or she will have gained more experience but there will be a new problem, of keeping track of what is going on over a large empire when there is only a restricted field of view on any one turn.

Cracking the game is part of the enjoyment and I don't want to spoil that, but I will give some ideas on how to learn.

First, try things out early, while you have plenty of men in a small area and no pressure from the opposition. Try out different tactics, fight battles at different odds, just to see what happens. Then when you have a choice of strategies in a crucial battle you will have a better idea of what the results are likely to be.

Second, read the newsletters (and articles like this one). Experience is the name we give to our mistakes, so learn from someone else's.

Third, arrange your attacks so that you will see their results. The classic early error is to attack in one direction while moving your commander in the other – so that you never know the fate of your attackers.

Sometimes you have to move away. In this case your only information will be from the number of men retreating. A good trick here is to make each attack with a different number of men, so that the total retreating tells you which attacks succeeded and which failed.



Decisions, Decisions!

The perceptive will already have noticed that the above pieces of advice conflict. The moves which lead to maximum expansion are not those which give maximum information and both of these objectives can clash with feeding your men while building a satellite.

It is this kind of problem that makes **Vorcon Wars** an interesting game. When all the rules have been learnt and all the tricks acquired, there are still some choices which just have to be made on the basis of judgment and generalship. And that's the way it should be.

Design Critique

So how does **Vorcon Wars** stand up to the principles I wrote about in the last issue (or vice versa)?



The game is about battles, according to the designer. But battles are not just about fighting, they are about getting one's men to the place of conflict and supporting and equipping them. So far I have found the level of detail well suited to the subject, with enough richness to keep things interesting, but not so much that the player gets drowned in logistics.

The approach to input and output is similar to that in **Starlord**. This is an efficient way of handling data, but if I had been doing it I would have had mnemonic codes for the various battle orders and projects. This would have made things easier on both players and input typists at a fairly small cost in programming effort.

The development seems to have been well carried out. The game appears bug-free, and there are some nice touches in the sequence of events to allow for interaction between different players' activities. Note the careful rules for what happens when two players try to reclaim the same sea hex.

One weakness I see in the game is in the presentation of the rules. The newsletters are full of rules queries and clarifications. Some of the points in my section on feeding your army aren't in either the rulebook or any newsletter; I had to write to the GM to get a ruling. This seems to be the old story of an author writing rules the meaning of which is obvious to him because he knows what he means. This is why I suggested blindtesting rules before they go out.

That said, there are some good points. There is a sequence of events, there are good summary tables of hex types and projects. As for my last requirement – **Vorcon Wars is fun!** ●

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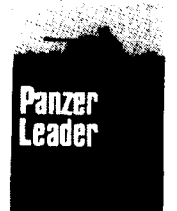
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DIRECTIONS FOR NEW CRANE OPERATORS



'WRITE ME an article about Tribes of Crane,' said the editor, adding with a touch of bitterness born of his own experiences, 'especially on what a new player should do if he finds his tribe plonked down in the middle of a desert miles from anywhere.'

I always remember my own early days in Crane with a little discomfort. Growing pains for a new tribe can be very real, to the extent of total extinction if bad luck and bad play coincide. Partly for this reason (and partly to gain future allies), I have always liked to help new tribes that I make contact with in Crane, and if you want to discuss this article or indeed any aspect of Crane, write to me via the FLAGSHIP editorial address.

The first thing that can be said about being plonked down in the middle of the desert is that it can be avoided. The second is that there are worse places. Your choice depends very much on what sort of game you want.

When you apply to join the game, you make two very important decisions: the type of tribe (wandering, war, caravan, or sea tribe) and the rough longitudinal area. (polar or semi-polar; desert; semi-desert; temperate). The latter has a critical effect on your first monthly growth figures, and should be considered with great care. At the end of each month, the gamesmaster will adjust your population and all your livestock according to (a) the terrain and (b) the extent to which your tribe is supported (fed) by herd animals. This adjustment ranges from a crippling -30% to a pleasant +10% (up to +30% of livestock, though warhawks are, curiously, unaffected). The table (from the Crane rulebook by permission of Mitregames) shows the precise values.

As you can see, desert is considerably better than permanent ice, though the best chance is given by asking for a temperate area. Note that this does not guarantee that your initial sector is hospitable, but there is a high likelihood of grassland or temperate forest being within easy movement distance. A good idea is to send your registration sheet in near the end of the month; your initial position will then be returned early in the following month, giving you time for two or three turns to find good terrain before the first monthly adjustment is made. An alternative approach is to opt for a sea tribe: as shown on the table, sea sectors always give +10% population growth, and sea tribes always start in sea sectors (it will then be better to send your registration in early in the month to ensure that you get a quick adjustment).

You can, of course, decide to take the challenge of a land-based polar tribe rather than go for the conformist safety of the temperate areas. However, the game is immensely challenging even without self-imposed hurdles and I do suggest you think long and hard before undertaking such a challenge.

SEA TRIBES

In addition to the environmental advantage, sea tribes in fact have other features which probably make them the best type to pick when you first play the game:

- (i) *Speed* There are only two ways to move quickly on Crane. The first is by warhawk, and *one* warhawk is expensive, never mind 400 to equip the whole tribe. Nor can you transport trade goods by warhawk. The second is by ship. Initially, you will be able to move up to three sectors per turn (without scouting) rather than the one for land tribes. By buying special ship types, this can eventually be increased to six or (in emergency) even to ten.
- (ii) *Trade* The best two or three Crane trade routes are across sea. Speed is also an advantage for trade, since it moves your goods from purchase to sale faster, increasing your income per turn.
- (iii) *Combat* Sea tribes can outfight warhawks, since a higher combat strength per warrior can be achieved using heavy galleys.

Other tribes do have their own built-in advantages for expertise. War tribes gain

TRIBES OF CRANE RULES SUMMARY

You are the leader of a nomadic tribe of the world of Crane which was once well-developed but has been devastated by plague. Map composed of 48 x 96 square sectors. Movement rate = 1 sector/turn for land-based tribes (horse and roads (rare) increase this). Sea-based tribes - see main body of article.

Orders issued via turn sheet. You specify:

- Combat tactic (nine choices); e.g. enfilade right
- Movement direction and sectors moved through
- Adjacent sector to be scouted
- Training of warriors - up to half of tribe
- Any trading, if in a city
- Any transfers made to other adjacent tribes or figures
- Any special remarks to GM, or any special actions to be attempted. Anything can be attempted, imagination only limit, but should be plausible and within a tech limit of 1000 A.D. if success is desired. No magic.

GM reports success/failure of actions on rear of turn sheet. If a battle has occurred, GM also sends a battle report sheet, charging extra. Your own and your opponent's tactics, the number of warriors you each have and any special actions either has taken (e.g. in training, weapons, organisation) are compared. Result is a numerical value, your EWS (Equivalent Warrior Strength). Each side loses 10% of its opponent's EWS in warriors. Prisoners can be taken, gold recovered and animals and trade-goods plundered.

You discover extra rules as you enquire about the various things that you observe or which happen to your tribe. These rules come in the form of special information sheets. No charge is made for these. 60+ sheets currently known (with rumours of 80+). Your tribe may also receive information tokens on cities, secrets, maps, creatures, barbarian peoples, and much more. Other tokens represent possessions; e.g. gold, drugs, miscellaneous property.

MONTHLY POSSESSION ADJUSTMENTS

Terrain	Cariboux	Goats	Cattle	Horses	Unsupported people
Permanent Ice	+10%	-20%	-30%	-20%	-30%
Tundra	+20%	0	-20%	-10%	-20%
Mountains	-10%	+10%	-10%	-10%	-20%
Coniferous Forest	+10%	+10%	-10%	0	-10%
Temperate Forest	-10%	0	0	0	0
Grasslands	-10%	+10%	+30%	+20%	0
Tropical Forest	-30%	-10%	-10%	-10%	-10%
Semi-desert	-30%	0	+20%	+10%	0
Desert	-30%	-10%	0	0	-10%
Sea	0	0	0	0	+10%
City	0	0	0	0	+10%

Supported people +10%

an automatic combat bonus of 10%, and caravan tribes automatically get a 5% discount/premium in all cities. However, these advantages are not overwhelming, and easily matched by innovative play.

Whatever you decide, there are some early actions which you can take to increase your chances of survival. The first is to make full use of your scouting ability, in order to locate the most favourable terrain in the area; you can issue a conditional order to the gamesmaster that your main body should move to it, if the scouts are successful. An early attempt should be made to secure the Scouting Information rules sheet: tell the gamesmaster on turn one that you would like to send out several scout patrols on the next turn, in different directions, and ask for advice on how to order this.

ALLIANCES

A very valuable source of help is contact with one of the big Unions or Alliances, since these are largely run by experienced players. Some will give you free map information in return for loyal membership (or even immediately to welcome you in). Unions will also, quite possibly, be able to provide you with other types of advice, ask you to participate in 'projects' (and hence to get involved in the mega-military and/or political aspects of the game), and perhaps even lend you gold.

'How do I contact the Unions and Alliances?' I hear you say. I would strongly recommend buying the Play-By-Mail Gamer (US game) or Crane Newsletter (UK game). These contain frequent recruitment notices from the various organizations with contact addresses. Do not, however, be taken in by all the player notices, and still less by the rumours. Very few of the latter seem to be true and some are designed to mislead the unknowing. I know I send in such deceptive rumours! I would not recommend immediate purchase of all the back issues, since these will probably leave you feeling lost and confused; you can have a go at them later when you are more familiar with the game.

GOLD

It is vital to keep in mind that gold (Crane's currency) is virtually the be-all and end-all of survival. This applies particularly to a new tribe, since gold is needed for training the troops needed for basic defence. If you

want to work your tribe up to being a formidable opponent, much gold will be required.

The best way to get gold is to trade. Choose the most lucrative route that you can find and work it as long as you can without getting bored. If you are lucky enough to be near one of the better routes you can make a profit of between 100 and 500%.

Priority in spending your profits should be given to training as many warriors as possible. Larger sums can be invested in armour and warhawks (unless you are a sea tribe, as noted above). You will probably be offered the chance to buy an ancient map of part of Crane. Forget it: they are hard to interpret, may well not be of your local area, and are essentially a luxury for wealthier players. If you are offered a secret of Crane, however, it may be worth considering: find out what you can about it and ask any experienced players with whom you are in contact for their advice. Treasure secrets are generally worthwhile: you may have to fight a few barbarians to get hold of the treasure but it could be worth 1000 gold or more. Similarly, secrets of long-lost military techniques (e.g. fire-bombs) are normally a good investment, since they increase your combat strength and therefore your chances of survival.

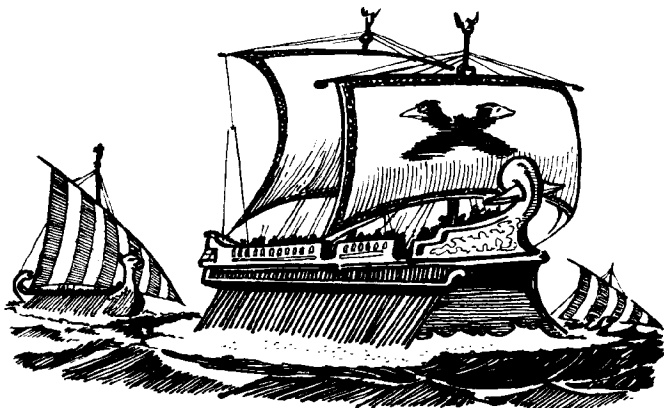
Gold should also be used for bribes, either raw or converted to a few herd animals. Suitable recipients are the political figures in cities, such as the first merchant, shamen, and Kinglords, at the same time that you request a discount or

premium on trade. You can obtain better terms to the tune of up to 15% (20% for caravan tribes). However, it may take a little while to achieve this maximum, and a few smaller bribes may eventually achieve more than one fat one. In addition, spread your bribes among all the city political figures, to establish good local relations: if you have a rapport with the city bigwigs they may well give you information, set you exciting tasks to undertake, or even give you gold.

PERILS OF FIGHTING

A few final points. Do not worry about the points system, which supposedly gives a comparative rating of tribes. All it gains you is a mention in the newsletter, if you are one of the highest or lowest tribes of your type. They are only a measure of the gamesmaster's idea of how a tribe should be run: forget them and do your own thing.

Lastly, beware of instant aggression! Recently somebody came across my tribe and immediately attacked it. It was relatively obvious that he was a new player, since his tribe consisted of exactly 400 people, the original figure. The point here is that I had literally over 4000% of his combat ability. The gamesmaster will make your tribe attack anyone it meets unless you specify otherwise, so for the time being it is an excellent idea to issue a standing order to remain peaceful unless the other party acts aggressively. This enables you to avoid early attrition of your warriors, and incidentally to save the cost of battle reports.



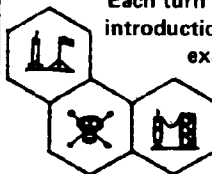
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ASSUMING that my last article has inspired you all sufficiently to sample amateur postal gaming, there is the old question of 'how do I start?' Many people are attracted initially to this strange hobby by their friends. However, this helps to foster the false impression that the hobby is organised solely for a small, vocal clique, which is closed to newcomers. This is very misleading since the opposite is true. If established postal gamers find out that you are new, you are likely to be deluged with hints and friendly advice. Hobby members, on the whole, recognise the value of bringing fresh people into postal gaming and, as a result, all sorts of introductory services have been set up and maintained. These will aid you to find out more about the hobby in general, discover where there are openings for games you want, and then, having settled down, make sure your games are run to a conclusion.

One of the curious aspects of postal gaming is the way the American and British hobbies have developed almost completely separately. However, this isolation does not seem to have affected the way in which they cater for newcomers. In fact the arrangements made on both sides of the Atlantic show many marked similarities.

THE NOVICE PACKAGE/SUPERNOVA

In both America and Britain there is a booklet you can buy, which will be packed with all sorts of amusing and illuminating information about the state of the amateur postal gaming hobby. *Supernova* is the strangely titled 'American Novice Project'. It is a chunky 36-page booklet, concentrating solely on postal Diplomacy. It is very thorough in its approach and it contains articles on the strategy and tactics of the game as well as an extremely useful explanation of all the jargon which abounds in the hobby. Also enclosed is a regularly updated list of postal Diplomacy contacts. A major advantage is its price (or lack of it), since it costs only 75 cents, and it is actually free for newcomers.

The Novice Package is the predictable title of the British version of *Supernova*. It is somewhat different in its approach to the hobby. First of all, although much of the content concerns postal Diplomacy, many articles are included on other games like *En Garde*, *1829*, and *Sopwith*. The personal aspect of the hobby is also stressed with the inclusion of a 'Who's Who' listing of notable personalities, in

THE AMATEUR SCENE

Part II: Finding your way around by SIMON BILLENNESS

addition to the obligatory 'let's explain all the jargon' article. Newcomers are encouraged to start straight away after receiving the package since it is accompanied by a complimentary copy of the previously mentioned publication *20 Years On*, which lists nearly a hundred separate British, European and American amateur publications, and explains which postal games are available where. All in all, it is slightly larger than the American version which may account for its higher price of £1.



THE ZINE REGISTER/20 YEARS ON

There is an American version of *20 Years On*, though it is only available separately from *Supernova*. *The Zine Register* is in fact larger and more concise than its British rival. It lists amateur postal gaming zines and services from all over the world and has the added advantage of providing a 'cross game reference' which lists alphabetically all available postal games, showing exactly where openings for new players exist. The only disadvantage is that it is produced once a year after a vast information-grabbing binge, as opposed

to *20YO*, which is updated quarterly. However it is the best place to find out more about the American hobby and it only costs \$1.

20 Years On, by comparison, is smaller, cheaper and consequently easier to update. It contains the best information on the British hobby and is yours for only 35p (£1 for 3) or 25p plus postage if you live abroad.

PONTEVEDRIA/KNOWN GAMES OPENINGS

However, there do exist in America two services which provide regularly updated information on game openings. *Pontevedria* is a small xeroxed list of postal Diplomacy and other strategic multi-player game openings. *Known Game Openings* I have little information about, though I do know it is available for free whereas to receive *Pont* you need to send a stamped self-addressed envelope.

CENTRAL GAMESTART SERVICES

One advantage of the British hobby, from a newcomer's standpoint, is the existence of a growing number of Central Gamestart Services which are simply not available in the States. They exist to provide new players with a fast gamestart in what is hopefully a reliable amateur postal gaming zine. The service itself is free. You simply send your name and address to one of the organisers and when enough players write in for a game (usually about six or seven) he will send the names and addresses to an editor of a zine, who has expressed an interest in running the game. You will probably have to pay a fee game of about £1.50 to play in the zine but that is greatly cheaper than the fees charged for professional postal games.

You have no choice of where you play, the only major disadvantage with this system. Unfortunately, this sort of service only exists for a few games: *Diplomacy*, *1829* and *Sopwith*. Note that for the first two you need a copy of the game, whereas *Sopwith* can be played without (see Tom Tweedy's article).

ZINE BANK

Many widely played postal games are not available through the Central Gamestart Services, and there are newcomers who want complete choice of where they play their games.

Perhaps one of the best ways to sample a variety of those mysterious postal gaming

THE G.M. AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE
BEING THE LIFE + TIMES OF A POSTAL REFEREE

2.15 THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

ROBERT	10-11	10-11
FRANK	10-11	10-11
ALAN	10-11	10-11
JOHN	10-11	10-11
DAVID	10-11	10-11
MARK	10-11	10-11
STEVE	10-11	10-11
PAUL	10-11	10-11
CHRIS	10-11	10-11
ANDREW	10-11	10-11
ANTHONY	10-11	10-11
DAVID	10-11	10-11
FRANK	10-11	10-11
ALAN	10-11	10-11
JOHN	10-11	10-11
DAVID	10-11	10-11
MARK	10-11	10-11
STEVE	10-11	10-11
PAUL	10-11	10-11
CHRIS	10-11	10-11
ANDREW	10-11	10-11
ANTHONY	10-11	10-11

SO, HAVING WRITTEN TO EVERYBODY I COULD THINK OF...

... I WAITED FOR THEIR REPLIES...

... THEN THEY ALL ARRIVED AT ONCE...

HELP!

WORN PATCH IN CARPET

A THIDDLING THUMB

... & WAITED...

NEXT ISSUE: THE REPLIES...

zines is through the Zine Bank. This is a service, like the CGS, which is unique to Britain. It is very straightforward. You send a *large* (preferably A4 or foolscap) stamped self-addressed envelope and £1 to the Zine Bank, and you will get back a varied selection of postal gaming zines. You can specify what sort of games or zines you are interested in (e.g. zines just running Diplomacy, or those running a variety of games). I expect that orders are accepted from abroad but remember the Zine Bank only holds stocks of British zines and that the postage costs will be greater, so enclose around £2.

RULES BANK/VARIANT BANK

Although many amateur postal games are based on proprietary games, modifications to the existing rules are often necessary for postal play. When you join a game, you will be given a set of 'house rules' which outline exactly what differences exist. If you wish to compare house rules before you join a game, then you can write to the Rules Bank custodian (who happens to be the Zine Banker too) enclosing an SSAE, since he holds stocks of different versions of postal games rules and will know where you can obtain copies of those which he does not possess himself.

In the realm of Diplomacy however there exists a school of thought which maintains that the original game can be improved upon. This has led to the establishment of a vast body of alternative, expanded and adapted 'variants' of Diplomacy, many of which are also available for

postal play both in America and Britain. I will expand further on this topic in a future article.

ORPHANS SERVICE

Unfortunately one of the disadvantages of playing postal games in an amateur format is that occasionally the person who is running one of your games, maybe through no fault of his own, is unable to continue. If this happens then your game is known as an 'orphan', being bereft of a 'parent' zine. In these cases there exist developed services to 'rehouse' your game and get it running again with a minimum of fuss.

FRIENDLINESS

Of course, no article about the hobby would be complete without stressing the importance of good old *friendliness*. This is a small amateur hobby and, as a result, there is much greater contact between somebody running an 1829 game and his or her players than between a professional postal games company and their customers. Zine editors, GMs, and other players are often very amiable and quite prepared to answer any questions a newcomer may ask, no matter how insignificant they may appear at the time.

For many people the actual games are secondary to the friendships made between players. I have written and chatted to literally hundreds of different people whilst playing postal games, many of whom I regard now as personal friends I would not have encountered otherwise. However to delve deeper into the whole tightly-knit

structure and subculture of postal gaming would require an article ten times longer than this at least. Maybe next time . . .

ADDRESSES

Supernova: Bruce Linsey, 24A Quarry Drive, Albany, NY 12205, USA

Novice Package: Martin Le Fevre, 48 Albatross Way, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 3HQ, England
20 Years On: Simon Billenness, 20 Winifred Road, Coulsdon, Surrey, CR3 3JA, England

The Zine Register: Roy Hendricks, 128 Deerfield Drive, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15235, USA

Pontevedria: Rod Walker, 1273 Crest Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024, USA

Known Game Openings: Robert Sacks, 4861 Broadway 5-V, NY 10034, USA

Diplomacy CGS: Tom Tweedy, 29 Stanley Hill Avenue, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 9BD, England

1829 CGS: John Wilman, 37B High Street, Ely, Cambs, CB7 4LT

Sopwith CGS: Richard Morris, 1 Highland Ville, Lightcliffe, Halifax, HX3 8AG, England

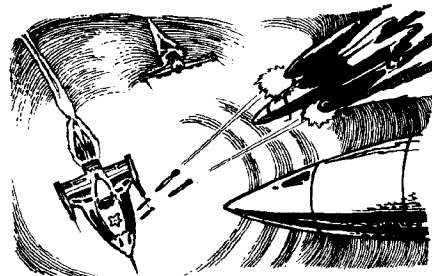
Zine Bank/Rules Bank: Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Herts, HP23 4DW, England

Variant Bank (UK): Andy Poole, 27 Holmfield Avenue East, Braunstone, Leicester, England

Variant Bank (US): Rod Walker, 1273 Crest Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024, USA

Orphans (UK): Nick Kinzett, 11 Daleway Road, Green Lane, Coventry, CV3 6JF, England

Orphans (US): John Daly, Route 2, Box 136-M5 Rockwell, NC 28138, USA



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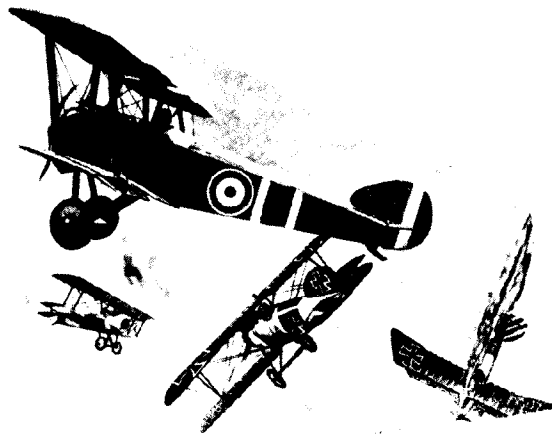
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A chance to be the Red Baron! TOM TWEEDY pours fuel on

The SOPWITH REVIVAL



SOPWITH, an aerial World War I game for six players, started off as a rather unsuccessful board wargame. The reason for its failure and sudden demise, or so I'm told, was because the game was originally aimed at *serious* wargamers – who found it far too simple for their taste, and therefore totally uninteresting. Sniffed at by the wargaming fraternity, it faded into virtual obscurity (no-one else getting much of a chance to look at it).

Now, this was a shame, because although it IS a simple game, it's a game requiring strategy, tactics and skill. In fact, it has enough skill to satisfy even the most demanding of gamers, yet enough fun and simplicity to get out and play at any time. Dice are used only to move clouds of

standard shapes across the board – the only random effect in the game – and have absolutely no effect on the skilled player... if he's careful of course. Blunder round the board and you can end up like a couple of people I've played with: crashing from cloud to cloud taking damage. But who wants to play a game where there's absolutely no risk? What is the skilled Sopwith player – a mouse? Certainly not; most players, I've found, are secret Kamikaze pilots and damn good to boot.

The board itself is one large hex made up of smaller hexes (for postal play the hexes have been numbered A1-S19). In the six corners of the hex sit the airfields; each airfield has three airstrips. Players can only take off, reload, repair and land at their own airfields – though they can't land, reload and take off in one turn... a limitation known as the 'Sitting Duck Syndrome'!

As in Diplomacy, all movement is simultaneous, though each session or 'Turn' the players can move three times. Each player has a board on which he records his moves and firing. He has his airfield from which he takes off, and a credit of 16 ammo and

12 damage points. Realistically, the firing has effects declining with the distance between each plane, 4 points being the maximum damage inflicted, falling to 1 point when planes are 4 hexes apart. When a pilot has killed enough protagonists he can become an 'Ace', which adds another point to the damage he can inflict and another manoeuvre to his repertoire (the 'Immelman Turn', enabling one to about-turn).

In order to avoid 150-year-old pilots, planes also take damage when flying into clouds (normally 1 damage point deducted for every hex of cloud you move through); Planes are 'dead' when damage points reach zero. Dastardly deeds are covered (for the nastier elements among you) – players can strafe others' airfields while opponents have landed, and are reloading or repairing.

All in all this is a game I would thoroughly recommend playing. Unfortunately, the boxed set is very hard to come by, as production has been discontinued. Originally produced by a firm called Gametime Games, the game is now owned by Avalon Hill, who, I am informed, have no immediate plans for its re-release ('no demand'). A great pity.

However, all is not lost. Although the boxed set is no longer available, it is perfectly possible to play with just a copy of the rules. Indeed Sopwith now has a very strong postal following growing by the month. Quite a number of hobby magazines now carry the game because it slips excellently into PBM mode: these provide maps and rules at the start of each game. There are even Sopwith Statistics showing the 'standing' (or lack thereof) of players who strive to reach the Act status.

If you'd like to try it out, write to Richard Morris, 1 Highland Ville, Lightcliffe, Halifax, West Yorks, England HX3 8AG with a stamped addressed envelope (overseas players should send two International Reply Coupons instead), asking for a game-start and a copy of his statistics. Richard will refer you to a zine running the game as soon as possible: the game fee and the zine subscription cost are usually very low (cf. Simon Billenness's discussion of amateur zines in this and last issue).



SPECIAL OFFERS TO FLAGSHIP READERS

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



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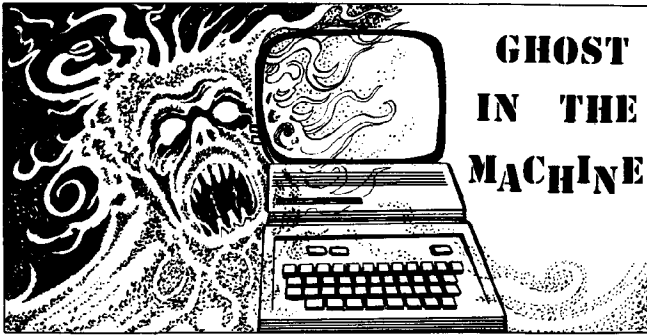
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This month's discussion forum includes NICKY PALMER opening a comparison of gamemaster styles, CHRIS HARVEY (head of ICBM, the biggest UK PBM outfit) sticking his neck out with predictions for the future of the hobby and JOHN NICHOLSON (of Vorcon Games) continuing his series advising new designers, this time looking at hardware problems.

A Choice of Ghosts [Nicky Palmer]

THE very first thing to decide when choosing a PBM game is whether you want it to be computer-moderated or merely computer-assisted (or even manually controlled): in the first case (well-known examples are Starweb and Starlord) the rules are laid down (and mostly, known to the players) in advance; in the second, many rules are developed and interpreted by a human gamemaster (GM) interacting with the players. This normally takes the form of adjudication of Special Actions: the player sends in a number of bright ideas, limited only by his imagination, and the GM decides what effect (if any) they will have on the game. Usually this is more expensive, since you are paying somebody to sit deciphering your scrawl and brooding about the consequences; it is often more fun: it also often has unnerving and unpredictable effects on the game, since you are at the mercy of the GM's interpretations.

So before plunging into a GMed game, it's worth comparing the styles of different GMs and deciding which suits you best.

The Civil Servant

The first type you can encounter is the *Civil Servant*. Cautious and usually anonymous, the Civil Servant will reply with the fewest possible words and take the narrowest possible interpretation of the rules. Universe II is in my experience normally GMed by Civil Servants, a not untypical sequence of events being my inauguration into the (GM-controlled) Regajian Empire. I asked the Empire what to do next, and was told 'Go to our trading planet at AX11'. I set out and crunch! ran slap into a Regajian minefield. I protested bitterly about this: how could I avoid a recurrence? 'Get a mine probe.' Ah, yes. But where? Next turn came the helpful reply (I should

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

ACTION #1 Broadcast to Soraba, Regajian Central Defense. Is this your customary treatment of new recruits? You invite me into a minefield, and when asked why you say you forgot I didn't have a space mine probe and offer to sell me one! Presumably if we'd been killed you'd have offered to sell our corpses to our heirs? Let's do a deal: you replace the spares which following your instructions has cost us (4 so far, 2 more this turn) free of charge when we get to AX11, and we'll buy your mine probe at the usual price (what is it?). OK?

Response WE ARE VERY SORRY, THE MINE FIELD IS ARMAGEDDON AND CANNOT BE SHUT OFF, WE WILL REPLACE THE SPARES,

... and an ensuing Specific Action with GM reply (pencilled original has been typed in for FLAGSHIP). Note that the reply does cover the main point, but it is quite brief and ignores the mine probe question.

have guessed); 'At our trading planet at AX11.' Since I was still on the wrong side of the minefield from AX11, I pointed out that this would mean further damage, incurred due to their instructions. Was this how the Empire treated its loyal subjects? If so, they could take their Empire and ... This elicited a somewhat longer reply, with clarity at last (see illustration). But, he added: 'beware of ionic storms on the way.' What do you mean, beware, I demanded? How do I avoid them? 'With a cosmo probe. We will sell you one at AX11.'

The greatest thing about Universe II Special Actions is that they are free: three actions included in the standard turn fee. Apart from this, I find the Civil Servant style a trifle wearying, with several turns needed to get simple points settled. Another terse GM I encountered was in Tribes of Crane with the following epic exchange:

please turn over



Extract from computer report in UNIVERSE II

EXPLORATION REPORT:

YOU ENCOUNTERED A SPACE MINE FIELD IN:

SECTOR: AR11

THESE MINES CAUSED DAMAGE TO YOUR POWER SUPPLY AND YOU HAVE LOST TWO UNITS OF POWER. YOU RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE WHILE IN THE MINE FIELD:

YOU HAVE VIOLATED REGAJIAN SPACE AND ENCOUNTERED OUR OUTER DEFENSIVE SCREEN. MAKE WHATEVER PREPARATIONS YOUR RACE MAKES WHEN TERMINATION OF YOUR EXISTENCE IS IMMINENT.

GM: You are invited to a political dinner with the local leader. Do you accept?

Me: Yes, and I offer my services; I ask him if I can join his forces and aid him in some way for reasonable reward? What would he like me to do?

GM: OK.

Me: What does the leader mean by 'OK'? I ask him respectfully if he can provide further details.

GM: His aides tell you he has left town.

The Frank Friend

The second type of GM is the *Frank Friend*. Chatty and personal, the Frank Friend will adjudicate your orders in the first person, with little attempt to wrap the reply up as the words of the mysterious alien being. The British Starmaster GMs generally adopt this approach, commonly saying things like 'I'm afraid I can't let you do this, since it would unbalance the game against smaller homeworlds'. Faced with a particularly tough neutral world with which I'd been at war for several turns, I asked if I could try to open negotiations with it, to which I received the candid reply 'Yes - but if you succeed I'll eat my breathing apparatus'.

I rather enjoy this style, since it recognizes the essential fact about a GMed game that the players and the GM are really exploring the possibilities together. For a *game-oriented* player it is more satisfactory to have a GM who is willing to debate the reasons for his adjudications and chat about the game as such than a remote figure who hands down adjudications from On High. It doesn't, however, enhance the *role-playing* side of play: for this you need the third type of GM.

The Actor

This is the *Actor*. Flexible and chameleon-like, he presents you with each facet of the game in a seamless picture of it as reality. If you meet a warlike enemy, he must be able to send you ferocious threats; if you meet an aged Scribe, he must croak out timeless words of wisdom. Above all, this kind of GM concentrates on atmosphere. A good example of this style is the GM of *The Keys of Bled*.

This is one of the very few games in which you can have unlimited free special actions, and the GM replies are often



longer than the questions. We learn of the weather, the state of the group's morale, the attitude of passing natives, and numerous other features building up our mental image of the planet Bled. The GM even wraps his rejections in a cloak of game atmosphere, as when I found a Carrier Eagle and attempted to discover what it would do for me.

Me: My group leader Sined approaches the Eagle cautiously and attempts to mount it. If successful, he encourages it to take off so he can survey the surrounding countryside.

GM: The Eagle courteously but firmly declines to be mounted. However, it remains attached to the party, and keeps watching Sined with a kind of wistful look, as if it were trying to tell him something.

Despite several efforts I was unable to discover its special talent, and as we approached a town the GM sent a final sad report:

The Eagle becomes restless as you approach Saranach Trantor. As you near the outskirts, it gives Sined a final long, reproachful look, and flies away to the south. Your party feel a sudden, deep sense of loss.

Crasimoff's World, of which I have less experience, is another game in which the GM tries for this type of effect. As will be clear from the description of these incidents, I personally like the Actor style best: I feel that I am entering a new world rather than merely playing another game. If the GM has the time and ability for lengthy 'atmospheric' description, so much the better, but even terse GMs can spend a few extra words to avoid seeming all too similar to the machines they are replacing: indeed, a chatty and intelligent program (Terra II is one example) may be more interesting than a Civil Servant GM!

One of FLAGSHIP's functions is to enable readers to find the games they will like without having to spend time and money on the others. Write and tell us *your* experiences, so we can build up a consensus view on GMing styles in each game.



Extract from GM report in *THE KEYS OF BLED*. The player has ordered his people ('The Friendship') to move rapidly NW during winter to reach a rendezvous with a force invading the adjacent region. As morale is low, he has ordered his cavalry to display their skills to the people. Note that the reply gives more detail than these instructions require, adding to the role-playing 'feel'.

As the FRIENDSHIP people hurry to the north-west they are encountering heavy snowfalls. This is making it difficult for your scouts to carry out their job properly, but at least you are comforted by the thought that it is the same for anybody else in the area. Your scouts report that you appear to be travelling through an area of open grassland, uninhabited, but the woodland to the south suggests that the area ahead may be of quite a broken nature.

Your messages are bearing fruit, and one has been answered by the CUZA people. Your people have made the extra sets of body armour you ordered, cavalry skills did not impress your people, buffeted by snow and concentrating on the hard journey.

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"There are tokens detailing magic, spells, creatures, parties met, artifacts, treasure, money, and many other items which you discover as you play the game. KJC Games has been running Crasimoff's World for over a year now, and the effort the gamesmaster puts into each turn never ceases to amaze me. Most players find themselves offered a different scenario each turn, or find that a new twist has happened to an existing adventure."

As reviewed in

WHITE DWARF

37

If you wish to enrol in Crasimoff's World, send a £5.00 cheque/P.O. payable to K.J.C. Games. For this you will receive a rulebook, set up material, the latest newsletter, and the first four rounds. Future rounds are £1.25 each.

U.S. enrolment \$10; fifth and subsequent rounds \$2.50.

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Return to:
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The future of PBM [Chris Harvey]

I FORGET who it was but someone said that it's easy to foretell the future. If you're right everyone thinks you're some sort of genius and if you're wrong then the future is so far ahead that everyone has forgotten who you were anyway. So with that thought firmly in mind I'll outline exactly what's going to happen to the Play By Mail industry over the next few years.

For those of you who came in late perhaps a little history may be interesting. PBM started when the first Avalon Hill game player realised that there was no-one in his state who knew what an Avalon Hill wargame was. This was about 20+ years ago when I was 15. The only way to get around that problem was to play your game of Stalingrad or D-Day by post with someone who you had met through the pages of Avalon Hill's house zine *The General*. This magazine had one particular benefit for potential PBM'ers - a classified ads section on the back page, which listed hundreds of people just like you who couldn't find anyone to play their games with. In those days almost all PBM games were of the two player variety, and even DIPLOMACY had yet to rear its head. In the USA, however, anyone who wanted to get in touch with PBMers had only to subscribe to *The General*. In the UK the same thing happened, only it started with the game of Diplomacy and the various fanzines that that game spawned.

Back in the 1960's people used to dream about games that would have more than seven players, and indeed many Diplomacy variants were developed with more than seven participants. It wasn't until about 1970, however, that Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo Arizona advertised the first non-Diplomacy multi-player postal game, and to boot, one run, hold your breath, by a COMPUTER. (This was 1970 remember, you couldn't buy computers off the shelf, indeed most people had never seen one.) Rick Loomis sold his game of Nuclear Destruction through contacts from *The General* and pretty soon had a thriving professional PBM games company. Now, of course, computers are almost ten a penny and the PBM population has grown to the extent that a magazine like FLAGSHIP can be produced. In the 1960's all the Diplomacy players in the UK wouldn't have added up to enough to sell 500 copies of FLAGSHIP.

So what we have now is a growing population of PBMers, a proliferation of micro-computers and, most important, a growing awareness that the PBM hobby is big enough to pay people enough to work in it. Thus we have the boom in PBM games. The situation is very similar to that which existed in the UK when Diplomacy started to be run by post. Almost every player of a postal game thought that he could run a Dippy zine for fun and a bit of profit and saw no reason why his plans wouldn't work. The fact is of course that MOST Dippy zines that were started that long ago have folded and the drop-out rate for that type of magazine is still very high. The first prediction therefore is easy. The next few years will see the number of people offering PBM games shoot up and the number of business that will fold will be almost as high. With all these new people coming into the market place, the second prediction is also easy. The types of games on offer will increase with almost every new business. When you

please turn over

come right down to it, Starweb is not much different in concept from Nuclear Destruction. The game has a set number of players and runs until one wins. The first new ground has been broken by two companies who offer a different type of game. Schubel and Son and Clemens and Associates both offer games that any number of players can join and that don't have 'proper' endings: they just go on for ever. The second recent innovation is the game Warboird World which as far as I know is the first one that actually makes it impossible (*pace* John Pridmore in issue 1) for you to contact your opponents by hiding their identities from you. The next type of game that I predict will become popular is the personal role-playing game with each player playing one role in an unending game.

Another prediction that is easy to make is that within the next five years it will be COMMONPLACE to play your PBM game actually via your own home computer, perhaps even in real time. Someday soon there will be enough people stuck at home during the 9-5 working day that it will be profitable for a games company to run modem-connected games in real time, charging perhaps by the minute rather than by the turn. Such games will of necessity be pretty simplistic but they will get more and more complex until the market finds its own level.

You shouldn't however think that all this computerisation is all that's going to happen, and that all games are going to be run by electronic dustbins. Far from it. Computer PBM games are actually quite labour-intensive. The machine does the processing (old fashioned term for work) but someone has to tell it how to do that work. Schubel and Clemens have already introduced machine-readable data cards into their games that the player has to fill in, thereby eliminating the human GM, but by the same token, since there are all these people working in the PBM industry, someone is going to come up with a game that is detailed and complex but run almost entirely by hand. All it needs is someone prepared to live on a very low wage for a while, dedicate themselves to THE GAME and slowly attract fellow fruitcakes who are prepared to spend the time and money that that type of game will require.

The question of payment brings me to my last prediction. Turn fees will go up in general terms, regardless of inflation, and several games will stop running through bad financial planning. The problem with PBM games is that every newcomer thinks that they're games and they're fun. Nothing could be further from the truth. Running postal games reliably is boring hard work, and making any money at it requires perhaps twice the game fee that was first planned. Anyone can run a game for free or for a nominal fee, but you shouldn't be surprised if that is the first game that folds when other commitments appear. After all, most PBM games take a year to play and sometimes the person running them doesn't bother to plan that far ahead. One of the worst problems is success. Suddenly a game becomes very popular and all the GM's schedules get thrown out of the window. He suddenly realises that what was going to be a two-evenings-a-week system has turned into one that needs part-time help from the nearest wife/mother/girlfriend. At that point the game either folds or goes full-time, and if it goes full-time then a whole lot of costs that were never figured for have to be taken into account. It will be really sad over the next two years to watch excellent games go to the wall because of bad planning. Even if the game is bought up by some other business, the smell of failure will still attach to it. So, as a final prediction, a bright future for some games businesses, a lot of wasted money for some unlucky players and a high 'death rate' amongst PBM games.

If of course I happen to be wrong, then who's going to remember in a year from now?

**ARE YOU A SUBSCRIBER TO
FLAGSHIP?
turn to page 29**

Buying hardware for your own PBM game [John Nicholson]

PBM GAMING has been going on for many decades, with games like chess being played all over the globe, but computer moderation is relatively new. Large computers only became generally available in the 1950's, and not for games of any significance. However, over the years into the late sixties there was a growing advent of games, not PBM but fairly sophisticated and using the sizable storage space available on these machines. You had to work for firms owning one before you could even get access, so the games were written and played by an elite working in computer centres and large electronic companies.

There are many good games which started their lives on these mainframes including the adventure type and many of the space games based on popular television programs. In one case that I know of, whole Startrek scenarios were programmed into a mainframe computer owned by a financial business. At weekends, a group of people would come in to the computer centre to take different characters from the story, each playing from a different terminal in real time.

It was a small step from this stage to PBM. The first generations of computer moderated PBM games were played on a mainframe, but were usually not very complicated and tended to concentrate on the ability of the computer to 'number-crunch'. Highly coded input was required from players, and equally cryptic output would be returned to the player to decipher. Quite sophisticated economic models could be built up, Empyrean Challenge (see issue 1 of FLAGSHIP) being perhaps the closest of this type of games now running in the hobby.

Arrival of the Minis

Two developments in the early seventies radically changed the picture. Firstly, the introduction of minis and micros at dramatically lower prices brought simple computers within reach of a far larger section of the public. Secondly, systems programmers introduced simpler system software, which lent itself far more easily to the new aspects of gaming which the general public wanted. Words, phrases and even sentences could be typed into and understood by the machine with appropriate software, by contrast to the largely numeric input/output required by the first generation programs. Moreover, the new computers had the ability to do graphics in a true sense, rather than merely sketch graphs and charts by chains of asterisks. Storage of data became possible on cassettes and mini-discs, and printers began to allow smaller and more sophisticated output more suited to game reports.

Further developments are occurring, notably new methods of input - e.g. the controversial computer-readable cards pioneered by Terra II and now used in several games, and input by home computer via networks (to be discussed in FLAGSHIP 3). However, if you keep waiting for the next advance you'll die of old age before you start your PBM game, so how should you use the current technology to get started?

Choosing the CPU

Your first task is to decide the central processing unit which you want. If you already own a home computer, you may want to use that (if it can cope with the necessary peripherals), but otherwise you have a vast market to choose from, each machine having its own operating system, memory storage, languages and input/output sockets.

First look at memory. Storage capacity in the present 8-bit micros ranges from 1K to 56K, but note that all of that storage isn't necessarily available in certain modes (e.g. if you propose to write in BASIC). For any serious games you should be looking for 20K plus, and if you intend to have graphics you need at least another 10K.

The operating systems on different machines vary greatly; you should look for one which gives you ease of control of its peripheral devices (printer, disc drives). Attempts to

standardise operating systems have largely failed, most new micros offering their own.

There are many languages in use which have advantages for specific applications, but the most widely-used on micros is of course BASIC, an easily-understood language which allows rapid revision of programs. Assembly language will normally be faster, but the clarity and convenience of BASIC far outweighs the time factor for a PBM game, especially when it comes to debugging your program.

Next requirement is a printer, the price of which will depend on the quality of output which you want. Consider your game design carefully before buying. Do you need colour? Are there going to be detailed drawings on your printouts? Or will it just have tables and lines of text?

Data Storage

Finally, a disc drive is pretty essential – at least make sure that the CPU has an appropriate socket so you can obtain one in due course. Modern cassette tapes are adequate up to a point, but data retrieval times are disheartening, and using a disc enables you to extend the effective memory of your CPU by data swapping (which we will deal with in a later issue). More important still a disc is almost essential for storing the various security copies which you will need (see below).

Your program (or programs, if you find it more economical in space to split up the code into several sub-stages) will have three main parts: input, processing and output. Each of these need data to work on, and by far the most common method is to have this stored on disc or tape – you don't want to have to type in all the positions in your game every time! In theory, you could read all the input at the start from a data file, and write it all back, as amended by the program, at the end. In practice, system errors (or even program errors) will occur from time to time, destroying the data and forcing you to spend hours of frustrating work trying to recreate it as it was before disaster struck. You therefore need a security copy of



the original data to fall back upon. This may be obvious enough, but if you have several linked programs using different data files, what you will need is a whole set of security copies – and at that stage, if you weren't convinced already, you are likely to give in and invest in a disc drive.

Andrew Barton's comments in issue 1 are a useful guide to some of the strategic problems of programming, and I'd add one sobering point. After doing a blind playtest, and attempting to revise your program, you may gradually come to realise that the game is just not working out. The only thing at that stage is to scrap the design and start again: it's not an easy decision, but if you go onto the market with a game with partially-patched defects you'll soon live to regret not having made it.

By now you're wondering whether it is worth starting a PBM project after all, and the answer is still YES. If you are keen and prepared to go all the way, recognising that a great deal of work is going to be needed, then you should succeed.

In a later issue, I shall be dealing with more programming aspects and go into some detail on how and where to advertise.

First we brought you over 30,000 turns of **BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE** and **WARBOID WORLD**. Now we introduce our new Play By Mail game of **Xenophobia, Conquest, and Space Warfare** called . . .

CAPITOL

CAPITOL Features —

- A strategic space warfare game, completely computer moderated.
- Approximately 100 players per game.
- Players design their race's characteristics and description.
- Design your own starships and build them at your star bases.
- Expand your empire and conquer other races.
- An "advanced stage" of the game introduces new technologies of stargates and improved ship movement capabilities.
- CAPITOL's simplified order formats are easy to remember. No coding your orders onto computer cards or other gimmicks.
- CAPITOL has an easy to understand rule book, complete with numerous examples.
- CAPITOL was subjected to the largest playtest of ANY commercial PBM game. Over 100 players played 1500 turns of CAPITOL prior to its release.
- Adventures By Mail has been providing continuous 48 hour turn around time for all our games since July, 1981. Just ask our players!
 - Each turn of Capitol costs \$2.50 for the first 60 orders. Each additional 30 orders costs \$1.00.

"CAPITOL is fast becoming the standard against which other space warfare games are compared"

- With each rule book you receive a set of overlays to use in mapping the game and moving your ships.
- Mapping CAPITOL is extremely interesting, using the computer printed maps you receive with your turn results.
- No due dates. CAPITOL allows you three turns per month. Most other computer moderated games have the usual one turn every three weeks (approximately).
- Capitol is a balanced game. Each player may buy a maximum of two setups per game.

**SEND \$2.50 FOR COMPLETE RULES PACKAGE TO:
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HE was a cunning, hardened PBM expert, **SHE** was a voluptuous, sex-starved opponent. **ED** was a finely-tuned electronic brain, **GALL** was a thrusting, self-made millionaire. Read about their explosive meeting with destiny (soon to be a major motion picture) when **KEITH POTTAGE'S** Diplomacy theories meet their match in . . .

GAMESTART ALPHA VICTORY

AUSTRIA PAUL WRAY
ENGLAND ED PLATT
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GERMANY TREVOR GOMERSON
ITALY ALLAN TIMMS
RUSSIA KEITH POTTAGE
TURKEY EVELYN BAKER



A NEW Diplomacy gamestart. Perhaps it didn't give me the thrill that my first one did all those years ago (what does) but the prospect of spending the next year or two corresponding with six strangers, lying, panicking, and spending a fortune both on the magazine and the Post Office, still delighted me.

This was to be my sixth game of postal Diplomacy. Having won my first three outright and being well ahead in the other two I'd decided to try a Diplomacy Fanzine (Dippy Zine) new to me in order to play against opponents who with luck hadn't heard of me.

I dashed off six letters briefly introducing myself and saying that my playing record was five games, with one outright win, two draws, one early elimination, and one game still continuing that I had no chance of winning. Now lying from the outset may not seem like a good idea but I thought it was safe enough. (A quick check with the editors of the two other zines I'd played in told me that none of my opponents subscribed to their rags.) It's a good idea to let your opponents know that you're neither brilliant at the game, nor a complete ninny. Either is just inviting attack. As usual I offered undying support and a rock solid alliance to each player and suggested moves beneficial to us both.

The first reply I got was from Turkey. Now I'd never played against a girl before and had written to her in a deliberate non-sexist way. Treating her as an intelligent individual, a person rather than a woman, and making no reference to her gender at all. She replied,

Dear Keith,

I think that's a lovely name: Thank-you so much for your letter, I'll treasure it always. You seem so kind and warm. I too am lonely and really only started playing Postal Diplomacy in order to find someone intelligent and charming. And look what happens. The first letter I receive sends me into ecstasies!

(THIS WENT ON FOR A FEW PAGES BUT I'M SURE YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED) She finished:-

As for your suggested moves of standing our fleets off in the Black Sea and moving our armies against Austria, I agree. Anything you say Keith, ANYTHING.

Lots of love, Evelyn XXXX

P.S. My friends call me 'Thunder-thighs'.

In the three-cornered conflicts that usually arise around the Balkans and the Low Countries the important thing is to have one of your opponents as an ally and not be the one left out. And if an alliance with Turkey meant yet another early Austrian elimination did I care? Did I hell! The next day however I received a letter from Austria which said (after the personal stuff),

I don't subscribe to the widely held belief that Austria, or any other country for that matter, is weaker than the rest. I feel the seven countries have almost equal chances of winning but that they MUST BE PLAYED DIFFERENTLY. I'm sure Austria's terrible record in the early years is a result of players taking the wrong attitude, and panicking, on seeing that they have drawn Austria. A different style of diplomacy is needed with the different countries and I think the style to adopt with Austria, initially



at least, is one of firmness. I have written to Italy, Turkey and you saying, quite truthfully, that I intend to open the Hedgehog. (A Vie-Gal, A Bud-Ser, F Tri-Ven). I will not be talked out of this or agree to anything else. I've told Turkey I'll order A Ser-Bul in Autumn 1901 if there is any unit at all in Constantinople after the spring moves and I will. (Talking of Turkey, I don't think you've much chance of an alliance there mate. The letter she sent me ponedged like a Moroccan brothel and she calls me 'Big Boy'). I'm sorry if I appear forceful but it's just while I get a couple of builds to established myself. After that I'll certainly write to you in a rather more conciliatory vein (that means friendly). I guarantee I'll help you against Turkey any time you like.

All the best, Paul

Of course he would have written to Turkey offering help against me but he'd know I know he knew . . . da-de-da. This chap was obviously no idiot. His letter struck me as a very good way to play Austria. Forceful but honest. As for that tart 'Blunderthighs', I was beginning to wonder just how lonely she would be. She'd only known me two days and was unfaithful already.

Germany was a 16-year-old schoolboy (there's at least one in every game), whose father had picked up Richard Sharp's *The Game Of Diplomacy* (and a case of salmonella poisoning), at a jumble sale, and given it (the book not the salmonella) to his son as a birthday present. It was the lad's first game and he virtually copied the whole chapter on Germany, saying he'd keep me out of Sweden if I was doing well or I'd attacked Austria. This was because of Sharp's much publicised, and supported, theory that the best investment Germany can make is to do all he can to keep Austria in the game and thriving. It struck me that I'd have quite an advantage over this fool if I could get hold of a copy of this book. So I made a quick trip to the local charity shop and there it was.

'I'd like to buy this please', I said, presenting the book to the senile old dear serving.

'Certainly', said Miss Haversham, 'It's labelled 20p but you can have it for 5p if

you promise not to bring it back the way the other dozen or so people who've bought it in the last six years have done'.

As I returned home I found a letter, or rather a printout from England.

CHANCES OF ENGLISH VICTORY AFTER RECEIVING NO BUILDS IN 1901 1.4%
CHANCES OF ENGLISH VICTORY AFTER RECEIVING 1 OR MORE BUILDS IN 1901 16.4%

CONCLUSION: MUST ORDER THE ONLY MOVES GUARANTEED TO SECURE A BUILD i.e. F Edi-NWG, F Lon-NTH, A Lpl-Yor.
CHANCES OF RUSSIAN VICTORY AFTER OPENING A Mos-St.P. 10.1%
CHANCES OF RUSSIAN VICTORY AFTER NOT OPENING A Mos-St.P. 15.9%
CONCLUSION: SUGGESTION TO RUSSIA, MOVE SOUTH.

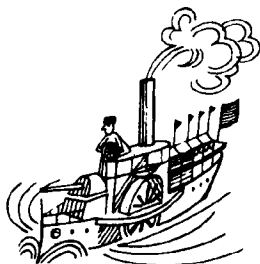
ENDIT.

ED PLATT (*Electronic Diplomacy PLayer Analyser, Theory and Tactics*).

Now I'd seen everything. I was playing a computer! I've always believed that the two elements of Diplomacy, the diplomacy itself and the on-board strategy are finely balanced. If you are competent at both you are likely to do better than if you are brilliant in one area and useless in the other.

I'd no doubt the computer's statistics were correct but a computer doesn't have a personality or the ability to lie. It might be able to play chess to a certain level, but Diplomacy, never. Or so I believed...

You can't clarify things too much in the pre-spring 1901 period and the time and money I spent on second letters to Germany, Austria and Turkey was well spent. The advantages diplomatically of telling your neighbours what your moves will be are huge, provided your moves are safe and you stick to them. Before the first season's moves each player looks around desperately for at least one ally amongst his neighbours, and between your moves and letters you must convince as many as possible of your friendly intentions. I'd told all three I'd open with F St.P.s.c.-GoB, A War-Gal, F Sev-BLA and that I hadn't yet decided about A Mos. So much was true. I also told each that I had very little idea of what the others were going to do. This was not true. However I've always had doubts about the player who writes giving realms of information gathered from the other players. Who is he telling your intentions to?



I'd sent in a set of provisional orders, moves which are used if you miss the deadline later, and was going to let them stand when I received two late letters. Some players deliberately leave writing until just before the deadline so that you can't check up on the contents with the other players. I find this infuriating as it means you can't clarify things with the writer either. The first letter was more good, tough, optimistic diplomacy from Austria. Very depressing. There's a lot to be said for the old theory that the best player may win a Diplomacy game but the second best player doesn't come second. If you are going to win you have to get rid of the best opposition quickly. He started out by reiterating his intention to open the Hedgehog, and more suggestions for attacking Turkey. He ended...

... when you see that I have in fact opened as I said I would I hope you'll feel as though you can put a lot of trust in our alliance. Each season I'll tell you what I'm going to order and continue to do so until you take advantage of the information to attack me. If you do I'll swing as many of my forces against you as I can. I do hope it won't come to that though, and I don't see why it should. If we start by killing off Turkey, then I expand through Italy and you through the north we should be all right.

All the best, Paul

A bit naive perhaps but you always want to believe letters like this. The other letter was from France.



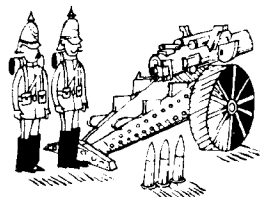
POTTAGE,

My name is N. B. Gall. Self-made millionaire. My friends call me 'N.B.G.' You call me sir. Now I'm not going to beat about the bush. I didn't get where I am today by beating about the bush. Enclosed is a cheque for £50. It is post-dated to the approximate date we will get the magazine. You can cash the cheque if you order: A War-Gal, F St.P.-GoB, F Sev-BLA, A Mos-St.P. If you don't I'll stop payment. I did consider telling you to NMR. But that would have been too easy. I didn't get where I am today by making things too easy. More instructions next season.

N.B.GALL GALLS TRIPE

Surely he couldn't be bribing all the players? When the magazine finally came, late of course, it appeared he may well have done.

AUSTRIA A Vie-Gal, A Bud-Ser, F Tri-Ven (all-round defence)
ENGLAND F Edi-NWG, F Lon-NTH, A Lpl-Yor (attacking Scandinavia)
FRANCE F Bre-MAO, A Mar-SPA, A Par-Bur (non-committal but a threat to Germany)
GERMANY F Kie-Den, A Ber-Kie, A Mun st. (moving north)
ITALY A Ven st., A Rom-Apu, F Nap-loS (non-committal)
RUSSIA F St.P.s.c.GoB, A Mos-St.P., A War-Gal, F Sev-BLA (attacking Scandinavia)
TURKEY F Ank-BLA, A Con-Bul, A Smy-Arm (attacking ME!)



Austria, England and Germany had moved as I'd expected. If that prat playing Germany would stick to his book he should let me into Sweden. Turkey had gone for me, hardly surprising considering Austria's threats. Italy had moved despite not having written to me, a depressingly common occurrence. If France was bribing him too he'd probably go against Austria or Turkey, either of which would suit me. All in all, I was quite happy and I had £50 to treat myself with. Now Evelyn only lived 10 miles away, so I decided to pay her a surprise call. Two days later I was standing on the doorstep of a large terraced house with a bunch of geraniums in my hand. A middle aged woman came to the door,

'Yes?'

'I've come to see Evelyn Baker'.

'Well it's not me, I'm the landlady.'

'Could I see her please?'

'Her? It's a man.'

'Eh?'

'Evelyn's a man's name as well, you know.'

'But I've brought him some flowers.'

'I've come to ask for a date.'

'People like you and Boy George make me sick', and she slammed the door in my face.

I leaned over and shouted through the letter box, 'Actually I'm from the Inland Revenue. Tell him he owes £450 in back taxes and he's due in court on Monday'. That'll give the little sod something to think about. I left the flowers for 'Evelyn' after scribbling R.I.P. on the card and stomped home.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE WORLD BEYOND FLAGSHIP

We hope you enjoy reading FLAGSHIP. However, if you want to read even more about PBM, there are at least five publications you might consider:

Nuts & Bolts of Gaming, 3753 W 80th Pl., Chicago, IL 60652 is the oldest PBM magazine, bimonthly, with reviews, features and lively line-drawings. One issue is \$2.25 (US/Canada), or \$3.25 (elsewhere); subscriptions are \$10.20 (US), \$12.20 (Canada) or \$13.20 (elsewhere). *PBM*, 17 Langbank Avenue, Rise Park, Nottingham, England NG5 5BU is produced by Emjay (Mike Costello), who is also publisher of *The War Machine* and *Wargame News*. This is a new publication, using the full glory of multifarious computer typefaces plus line drawings, with particular expertise in the opening areas of modem and cable gaming as well as general PBM coverage. Six issues a year are £5 (UK) or £8 (elsewhere). (See advertisement page 7).

Lone Warrior, 63 Beckingham Rd, Guildford, Surrey, England is the magazine of the Solo Wargamers Association, which has a variety of games in particular in fantasy campaigns. Six issues a year are £5.75 (UK), £8.75 (Europe), £10 (elsewhere).

A good *general* games magazine, not specialising in PBM, is *Games Gazette*, 4 Old Barn Rd., Leybourne, Maidstone, Kent, UK. (£5.50 for 6 issues in UK, £7.50 elsewhere) This is the magazine that is taking up where *The Gamer* left off; their open-minded enthusiasm for the hobby can be judged by the fact that they gave FLAGSHIP a free full-page advertisement without even asking us!

The closest partner to FLAGSHIP is expected to be PBM UNIVERSAL, a new magazine covering the same area as us. The editors are taking care to avoid duplication of material as far as possible, so readers who take both magazines should get maximum value for money. To enable you to sample a taste, the following article is by PBM Universal's editor. We'll let him take up the story...

As part of an exchange agreement between our magazines, I will be printing an article by Nicky Palmer in PBM UNIVERSAL #2 while he prints this article in FLAGSHIP #2. For those of you who are unaware of PBM UNIVERSAL, it's a professionally produced magazine exclusively devoted to play-by-mail gaming, with frequent fiction by Hugo and Nebula award-winning SF/fantasy authors. Single copy price is \$3.00; yearly subscriptions (6 issues) run \$15.00. Add \$1.00 per issue for overseas delivery. A detailed brochure is available upon request from: PBM UNIVERSAL/PO Box 437/Hawley, PA 18428/United States of America.

On handling the competition and finding the perfect ally

by BOB McLAIN

ALL situations, whether they are real or imagined, yield varying numbers of friends and foes, usually in percentages very favorable to the latter. For reasons not germane to this discussion, human beings (including PBM gamers) find competition desirable and, in most cases, second nature. Would we pay several dollars a turn just to quietly expand our industrial potential and trade diplomatic niceties with neighbors? Not likely. Victory may only come out of repeated clashes between fictitious starships, knights, paratroopers, or whatever might be applicable, and there are few among us who lament the arduous killing necessary to achieve a goal. However, the heroic deeds and conquests we all execute on a daily basis take place only in the mind, and, as it has been pointed out to me, we wouldn't be involved in simulations if we were inclined to perform these actions for real.

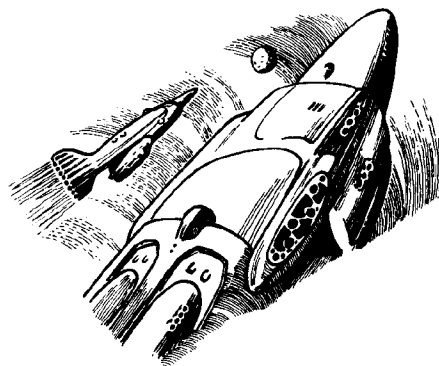
Every now and again, though, I'll meet an 'oddball' who joins a game solely out of an attempt to prove some obscure point, as was the case in a long past game of Nuclear Destruction. The 'oddball' in question phoned many of the other players, myself included, and stated his complete opposition to nuclear technology. His reason, as he put it, for entering Nuclear Destruction was to display how he could build only factories, not missiles or ABMs, and become the top industrial power

without ever dirtying his hands with uranium. At first we dismissed the fellow as a liar, who was concocting some elaborate deception, but when spy reports and repeated phone calls bore out his verbal intentions, we promptly eliminated him. I fully expected another phone call, but Peaceman (as he called himself) was never heard from again. The story, for whatever reason (perhaps the gleefulness we all exhibited while destroying Peaceman), still sticks out in mind, and it often makes me wonder whether we wargamers are the oddity, as opposed to the 'normal' person who unpretentiously goes about his business without ever conquering the universe (unthinkable, isn't it?).

Anyway, the topic of this article had originally been competition and perfect allies, although I see I haven't yet managed to address either subject. Most of us, it's safe to assume, would undoubtedly wish for more of both. I haven't ever been able to find anyone perfect, though, even after years of fruitless search. A perfect ally, in my personal estimation, would be intelligent, fiercely loyal, willing to generally follow my suggestions, generous with whatever I had in short supply, ready to die in my defense, etc. (Too bad I didn't marry someone like that.) I have found many people who fill the first four requirements but not the fifth, and I never expect to find this person of my dreams, especially when

I'm not a perfect ally myself. The best any of us can hope for is a 'good' ally; one who makes the game enjoyable and gives as much as he receives. There are quite a number of good allies in gaming, and I play more games than I should for the opportunity of meeting them. Lasting friendships have grown out of Starwebs and Star-masters, Battle Plans and Beyond the Stellar Empires, and the most enjoyable moments for me have come from not the hard-fought victories, but the people I've met and befriended along the way. That, more than anything else, will keep me an active PBM'er for as long as I can manage the money and the time.

And so we arrive at competition. There's



little of interest or topicality to add to what we already know. 'Avoid it when necessary, seek it when advantageous', as some bright spark quoted in times past and will continue to quote in times yet to come. Unsurprisingly, competition cannot be avoided in any field of endeavor, and those who propose peaceful settlements to obviously volatile and unsolvable situations should be immediately suspect. When, during the course of my very first Starweb game, I faced an inevitable points war with a veteran player, he somehow convinced me that 'it can be worked out so we'll both win.' I wish I could remember his argument, since failing to relate it here makes me out to be a fool, but regardless I took the bait and found a wealth of visiting starships on my barely defended homeworld two turns later. Experiences like this are incredibly valuable to beginning players, who are frequently too trusting for their own good. Since my first game of Starweb I've played the same stunt on others - with varying success - and keep a regular correspondence with the fellow who originally played it on me. That correspondence, in the long run, has been a much more valuable victory than the one I lost in Starweb.

Basically, to 'handle' the competition you must first be communicating with it. There are, of course, those players who refuse to answer letters, but they are (fortunately) a minority and very prone to the early deaths they so richly deserve. Getting the competition to respond is a major step in the right direction, since it proves your foe's maturity and his evident willingness to negotiate. In any group of people the one in the center of communications usually comes out on top. If for no other reason than that, you should write to *everyone* you can, enclosing self-addressed postcards with your letters if you've got the spare change to afford them. The players who respond, unless they're backstabbers, will almost certainly not attack you, enabling you to concentrate on those other few who remain silent. That's the only way I've found to handle the competi-

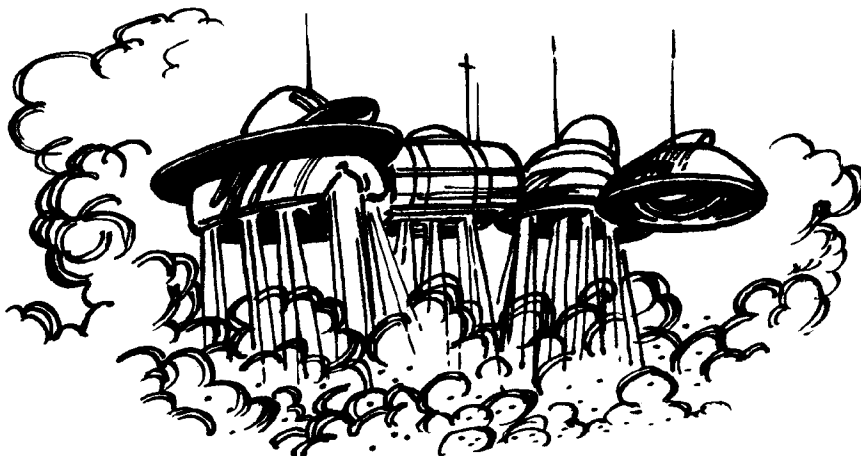


tion, excepting brilliant tactical maneuvers best left for a future article, and I've seldom been disappointed with the results.

One outstanding example of how the above 'system' bore fruit involves the editor of this magazine, Nicky Palmer, who luckily subscribes to the same rules of behavior as I. When he and I were creating our respective magazines, we were entirely ignorant of each other. This ignorance aided immensely in the creation of two very distinct publications, instead of the cloning that might have taken place if we had been in contact during the formative stages. Anyway, I first learned of FLAGSHIP through a very cryptic postscript that was tacked onto a letter from one of the US moderators. He was aware of FLAGSHIP and coolly advised me of 'the fierce competition' I could probably expect. Evidently, Palmer was apprised of PBM

UNIVERSAL in a similar manner, since I received a brief letter from him shortly thereafter requesting information about PBM*U. He didn't identify himself as the editor of FLAGSHIP, but I was already aware of this and his omission was cause for concern. I answered him the very next day, saying little about specifics but clearly expressing a (genuine) desire to cooperate. Palmer responded in kind, our letters grew in length, and we became that rarest of commodities: friendly competitors.

The benefits realized by the readers from this cooperative-competition will gradually become evident, although initially you can expect no duplicate coverage. Palmer and I coordinate each issue of FLAGSHIP and PBM UNIVERSAL, making absolutely certain that our articles remain as diverse as possible, unless a topic demands dual coverage (as was the case with Emyrean Challenge in our first issues, although that was more of an oversight). It would have been easy for two magazine editors trying to corner a finite market to become enemies, but the fact that we didn't is an excellent incentive for several unnamed moderators to reconcile (or attempt to reconcile) their differences. The marketplace can certainly accommodate us all, and if the hobby continues to grow, we - the original practitioners - want our place in the limelight. By scrabbling amongst ourselves we make it easier for a superpower (such as TSR Hobbies) to step in and snatch up the reins, and I don't think anyone wants to see that happen. We're on the threshold of an explosion in PBM and related activities, with new moderators literally springing up weekly, and the need for industry-wide organization is vital and immediate. Independent publications like FLAGSHIP and PBM UNIVERSAL are the first step in this organizing process, and I wish Nicky Palmer the very best kind of success one could possibly have.





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

STARLORD (UK)

This is due to undergo its first major revision as FLAGSHIP 2 appears. There will now be four citadel stars in the periphery which will be able to bombard the Throne Star and others at long distance, with particular effect on garrisons. The Princes controlling the Citadels should be able to reduce the Throne if they act in consort, forcing the Emperor to go out and fight for the Citadels. Princes will also get a strategic map showing all City stars within 32 astrals.

A second innovation is the Trade Star, at which garrison fleets can be left to earn stellars while the Command Ship is absent. Rules for bribing garrisons to surrender are also under consideration, as a further step to increasing the importance of economics in the game.

TIME PATTERNS (UK)

We have recently started our first game, STARGLOBE, after much research and considerable investment in computer equipment. We have one full-time staff member with part time software and technical backup. Our game is run in real time with no fixed deadlines or simul-

taneous moves. Our paramount aim is fast turn round. We believe we are moving into the second generation of PBM games, games that offer detail and colour and the chance to follow a fantasy - as well as straightforward fighting and conquest.

PHOENIX PUBLICATIONS (US)

We are a totally separate company from Capps & Capps, though we reside at the same address, and we are responsible for the PBM games GALAC-TAC and WAR-LORD. We had delays in obtaining supplies for both games, but are now back in action.

FLYING BUFFALO (US)

We now have 14 games of STARLORD going, with 31-42 players in each. Only one (other than test games) has an emperor so far (Dudar in game 11), though several others are getting close.

In HEROIC FANTASY, 12 players (again not counting test games) have managed to make it to the second level so far. Players who are still struggling in level 1 should be aware that (a) not everything is as it seems and (b) if you get down to the third level, there will be new magic spells, e.g. 'Charm Monster' and 'Invisibility'.

QUEST COMPUTER SERVICES (US)

We are now running a full-scale playtest of our fantasy campaign, planned for release next summer. This involves a contest between ten medieval aides to the king to carry out a task in a barbarian land linked with the kingdom by a magic port: gaining wealth and power will be important, but not the final goal, which is to be the first to conquer three specific castles in the barbarian world. More details will appear in the next FLAGSHIP.

CRASIMOFF'S WORLD (UK)

Our temporary gamesmaster has now

been succeeded by a permanent full-time GM, and we are now processing turns very rapidly and producing regular editions of the Newsletter for players.

THE KEYS OF BLED (UK)

Fully mounted groups have now been given a movement bonus, adding incentive to the training of specialised cavalry groups. The GM has now completed his move and is back to fast turnaround.

ICBM (UK)

The first UK game of Feudal Lords has started; the planned price cut to £1 per turn for Galactic Conquest has been accomplished. We note that a player called FLAGSHIP has taken the lead in game 7!

ARMAGEDDON (UK)

We are the only club in Britain running Diplomacy to weekly deadlines, as well as PBM chess and board wargames and a games-for-sale service; multi-player games of Machiavelli, Conquistador, Starfall and a Napoleonic campaign are now running.

CLEMENS & Assoc. (US)

The new quadrant opened in UNIVERSE II is attracting many new players. Some small alliances are forming near Gysarme, however, little exploration has been done as yet. The response to the new quadrant (IIE) for Australia, which is run by Chameleon Games, GPO Box 2302, Sydney, 2001 Australia, has been outstanding.

The research functions in both UNIVERSE II and TERRA II are proving to be of great interest to the players. One tribe in TERRA II already has its priests at work on magic amulets to protect its warriors.

ICBM (UK)

Our staple games Starweb, Universe II and Terra II are running satisfactorily, with a new quadrant open in U11 and a surprisingly fast take-up rate of tribes in T11. Turnaround time for both these games will have been speeded (we hope) by the time you read this, entirely due to justified criticism in FLAGSHIP. Most of ICBM's growth this quarter is coming from our UK-run games of FEUDAL LORDS (which has shot ahead in terms of waiting lists) and GALACTIC CONFLICT. We have many more games coming in 1984.

ADVENTURES BY MAIL (US)

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE (BSE) was selected by GAMES magazine as the only PBM game of the Top 100 Games of 1983. We now allow UK players to send double BSE turns for \$8.00, enabling them to keep up with US players.

CAPITOL'S playtest has ended. We processed over 1850 turns sent by our playtesters, plus another 700 in our staff playtest games. The rulebook came out so well that there are no errata to be published and none of the 200+ players had a question about the rules. We would like to thank all of the playtesters and rules editors.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Send this form (or a copy) with US \$11 or £6 to:
 (US readers) Flying Buffalo Inc.,
 P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale,
 AZ 85252-1467
 (Rest of the world) FLAGSHIP,
 P.O. Box 714, Coleshill,
 Birmingham, England.

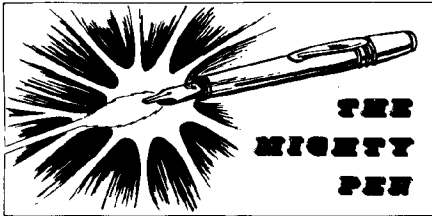


I'd like to subscribe to FLAGSHIP for four issues starting with number I understand that if I am dissatisfied, I can cancel at one month's notice and my sub. will then be refunded, minus the cost, at the one-issue rate, of copies already sent.

Name (please print)

Address

..... Postcode



Feedback for issue 1 is still quite limited as we go to press (and restricted to the UK where the magazine reached the stands first). In the next issue we should have much more extensive feedback and small ads from both US and UK readers. In the meantime we are concentrating on giving a hearing to specific criticisms rather than reprint the general praise which issue 1 received. NP.

What a Rip-off!

I'll get my only complaint out of the way first. 28 pages for the the price of FLAGSHIP isn't very good value, regardless of how good the content of the pages may be...

SIMON FILLIES

NP: Although PBM gaming is growing rapidly, the hobby is still very much a minority interest. Our issue 1 print run was 2400: if this sells out (as looks probable) we shall break even, but without paying any editorial salary, let alone making a profit. Our target circulation is 3000, which will enable us to have 36 pages per issue and still make a modest profit; we expect this to be achieved within the first year (this issue is 4 pages bigger.) Over-ambition is the great killer of games magazines – there are plenty of examples, and I've worked for two of them – and we are determined to keep expansion within the bounds of financial sense to ensure the viability of the magazine. This is also the reason for maintaining the same cover art for the first year. In the meantime, readers are getting a detailed guide to a hobby in which *every turn* in most games costs as much as the magazine, as well as discounts in every issue equal to a full year's subscription. If you start two new games a year using the discount coupons, and save two turn fees in a game you wouldn't have liked, by reading about it in FLAGSHIP, then the net cost of the magazine is *zero!*

A hint of Praise for Terra II

... I searched in vain for a single article on Terra II... Hardly a word about fantasy games such as Terra II... How about a few more articles on fantasy, especially Terra II... I was a closet role player, and only 'came out' when I discovered Terra II... are any of these new games as good as Terra II?... just include lots more about Terra II and I'll be happy.

DAVY JONES

NP: Are you implying an interest in Terra II? Oh, very well. See page 8.

No war-ride for them

... Worst article: The Great Subterranean War-ride. Actually none of the articles was bad. I place John's article last because I don't think his objective is a good one and also because I don't think he will be

successful in achieving it. I have no intention of digging a 'Great Tunnel' on somebody else's instructions... I'm not scared of any alliance attacking my Subterranean Industrial Complex. (SIMON FILLIES) I felt this was describing something not meant to be done. But I guess I'd get bored if there were no articles like this, so don't stop them. (JOHN REES)

NP: Yes, perhaps there won't be Great Tunnels all over the place after all – but the sheer fun of John's article, which several other readers praised, guaranteed its publication.

... We all thought the first issue looked sharp! If you can keep it up (and we suspect you will), you will have given the International PBM community quite a valuable publication. We also hope you will either expand the number of pages or increase the number of issues you publish per year.

As designer of Warboid World, I'd like to make a comment on the War-ride article. Although the author had an interesting idea, the plan isn't quite feasible to me because the participants would probably get shutdown by players using their tunnelling capabilities aggressively: to pop out right atop or adjacent to another player's STIC. However, we know of at least one better strategy for identifying another player in your game. And yes, we invite players to attempt to circumvent the game's non-diplomacy aspect for gain... we don't think it can be done.

JACK B. EVERITT
(Adventures by Mail)

Tribes flee floods on Bled in FLAGSHIP wake

... FLAGSHIP 1 was very impressive. It must be selling well, since after a slow start I have not been literally inundated with replies to the advertisement...

CHRIS DEMPSEY
(The Keys of Bled)

NP: Don't forget to mention FLAGSHIP when you reply to advertisers: a page of advertising pays for two more pages of articles, as well as adding to the breadth of interest of the magazine. Issue 1 is indeed doing even better than we anticipated, and it looks as though we shall sell out the whole print run. There seems to be a general consensus that PBM gaming has now developed to the point that it can support professional magazines, which in turn should stimulate further growth in the hobby.

Outraged of Yorkshire denounces July 4

... My main criticism is in the use of 'PBM' which is a dreadful Americanism we could well do without... What's wrong with using 'postal'?

RICHARD MORRIS
(of Halifax, Yorks, England)

NP: On balance we felt that more people in Britain felt at home with 'play by mail' than American players would with 'postal gaming'. So, just to confuse everyone, we use both (see the cover for the latter).

Defence of slower turnaround

May I just make a comment on the turnaround mentioned for UNIVERSE II (Paul Kerridge's issue 1 feature) as it is run in the UK? Of course we at ICBM recognise that the turnaround of a UK-run but US-based game is going to be relatively slower than a UK-based game. (Assuming that is that both enterprises offer the same regularity and reliability that UII does. Name for example five Dippy zines that run great cheap games, but never come out on time.) The point we would make in our defence is this. The *only* way a UK-based player can play a US-run game with minimum cost and inconvenience is through a service such as ICBM's. That's why the business was set up in the first place, to enable UK residents to join in the fun. We are trying all we can to speed up turns but we don't apologise for running US-based games in the UK. We boast about it.

CHRIS HARVEY
ICBM

NP: All very true, but it doesn't make the game any faster, and Paul was right to warn readers about this aspect. US players of Universe II and III have of course a much faster turnaround, which is why there is a separate quadrant for European players. An interesting question is whether the crossing of boundary quadrants (known to have happened between US quadrants) will one day bring European players into US quadrants, or vice versa.

Does Mrs Thatcher read FLAGSHIP?

British subscribers get their issue franked FREE ENTERPRISE WORKS. Is this editorial policy?

PAUL SEGAL

NP: No, FLAGSHIP has no political position. The franking is done by the distributors (who are noted for their interest in science fiction).

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

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

RAILWAY RIVALS offers more fun for less money than any other game, FTF or PBM. Details: UK-0642-2752 (evenings) or (FLAGSHIP subscribers only) free trial pack for 12½p stamp or 1 International Reply Coupon from 102 Priory Rd, Milford Haven, SA73 2ED, UK.

BOOJUM from Richard Morris, 1 Highland Ville, Lightcliffe, Halifax. 20p plus cost, 5-weekly. Runs Railway Rivals, Sopwith, Diplomacy and others. Send s.a.e. for sample.

UK CRANE: Join neutral Khanate Alliance. Manifesto available. 51 Calverdon Dr, Gt Barr, Birmingham B43 5HT.

ARMAGEDDON – see THE SPOKESMEN SPEAK – 35 Street Lane, Roundhay, Leeds LS8 1BW.



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

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

US

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

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

UK

Balrog Adventures, 39 Chapman Ave, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8EJ
 (Tel 0622-61210)
 ICBM, PO Box 94, Bath St, Walsall, West Midlands
 K.J.C. Games, 5 Vicarage Avenue, Cleveleys, Lancs FY5 2BD.
 (Tel 0253-853040)
 Keys of Bled, 95 King St, Ramsgate, Kent
 Mitregames, 77 Burntwood Grange Rd, Wandsworth Common,
 London SW18
 Starlord, 1 Rake Hey Close, Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside L46 6EW
 Time Patterns (Starglobe), 97 Devonshire Rd., Birmingham B20 2PG
 Vorcon Wars, 71 Juniper, Birch Hill, Bracknell, Berks

The following are the list of games referred to issues 1 and 2, cross-referenced to the companies above, with a guide to prices. Please note:

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

Game	US players contact...	US prices (dollars)				Other fees	UK players contact...	UK prices (pounds)			
		Rules & startup	Free turns	Turn fee	Other fees			Rules & startup	Free turns	Turn fee	Other fees
Crasimoff's World	KJC Games	10.00	4	2.50	1.20(b)	As US	5.00	4	1.25	0.75(b)	
Empyrean Challenge	Superior Sim	26.00*	1	5.00	(x)	As US	32.00	As US+\$2.50 postage (\$ only)			
Fleet Maneuvers	Fantastic Sim	15.00	6	2.50	None	As US	As US (\$ only)				
Keys of Bled	Keys of Bled	Free	4	2.75	None	As US	Free	4	1.50	None	
Starlord	Flying Buffalo	6.00	0	2.50	None	Starlord	Free	0	1.25	None	
Starmaster	Schubel	10.00	3	2.50	(z)	Mitre	7.50	2	1.50	(z)	
Starweb	Flying Buffalo	2.00	0	3.50	(y)	ICBM	3.00*	0	1.81	None	
Terra II	Clemens	10.00	2	3.50	None	ICBM	1.75	0	1.75	None	
Tribes of Crane	Schubel	10.50	2	3.50	(z)	Mitre	6.50	4	1.50	(z)	
Universe II/III	Clemens/Central Texas	7.00	1	3.50	None	ICBM	1.00	0	1.91	None	
Vorcon Wars	Vorcon Wars	2.50	3	1.75	None	As US	1.50	3	1.00	None	
Warboid World	Adventures By Mail	20.00*	3	3.50	None	Balrog	9.00*	3	1.75	None	

† Flying Buffalo and ICBM request players *not* to start games until they have read the rules (so have no starter package).

* Includes deposit returnable if you play to the end

(b) Charge for battle report when battles occur

(x) Turn fee is \$5.00 or 20¢/ship or colony or 5¢/order, whichever is most. Rulebook costs \$6 (US) or \$12.50 (elsewhere)

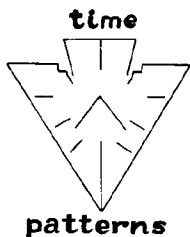
(y) US Starweb fees rise by 50¢ every 10 turns to reflect the larger forces the player is likely to control

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

COMING NEXT TIME

FEUDAL LORDS
 GALACTIC CONQUEST
 WARBOID WORLD
 . . . and much more!

Don't miss an issue of the FLAGSHIP of postal gaming!



STARGLOBE

*A game of Interstellar
Exploration, Combat
and Conquest*

- ★ U.K. BASED
- ★ NO WAITING TO JOIN
- ★ TESTED SOFTWARE
- ★ REAL TIME GAME
(1 earth day = 1 game year)
- ★ NO TIMED MOVES
- ★ NO DEADLINES
- ★ NO LIMITS ON NUMBER OF STARSHIPS PER
PLAYER
- ★ 3-D UNIVERSE OBEYING RELATIVITY
- ★ LOTS OF PLANETS TO EXPLORE AND
CONQUER

The game is based on a STARGLOBE of 2000 stars in which a lost colony has established itself. You are a STARSHIP CAPTAIN, sent by the autocratic rulers of the lost colony and their powerful computer to explore and conquer part of the huge globular cluster, 100 light years in diameter. A course has been planned for you and programmed into your ship's computer, but you can choose whether or not to obey these instructions and where to steer among the 2000 stars. Whichever choice you make, you seek to advance to a position of power by intelligence, initiative, conquest and sheer good luck.

Regular Cost: £1 per report (USA \$3 including first class airmail). Reports can be sent as often as twice per week or as seldom as once per month depending on your actions.

Send £2 (\$6 USA) to STARGLOBE, 97 Devonshire Rd, Birmingham B20 2PG, UK (cheques made payable to: Time Patterns) for the introductory package and pre-launch questionnaire: this sum will include your first move in the game, which will be the launch of your starship from the home planet in the centre of the globular cluster.

THE EAGLES OF BLED SEND CONGRATULATIONS TO NICKY PALMER AND FLAGSHIP

THE KEYS OF BLED

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

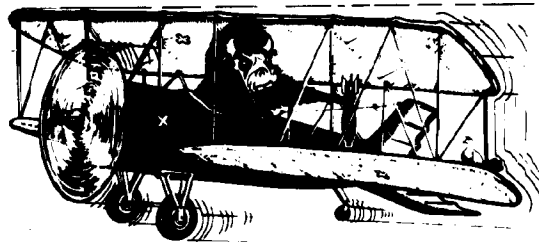
The game system embraces multiple group control, each of which is able to act independently of the others, a combat system which allows you to deploy individual units prior to combat actually taking place, assigning both objectives & risk levels on a detailed combat resolution sheet, and more detailed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

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

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

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

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



- ▶ **Our games are completely refereed by our computers.*** No human moderator interferes with your game. The computer is fast, unbiased, and does not make mistakes. It treats *all* the players exactly the same. We don't move units in your game. And we don't interpret your orders according to how we think you should be playing the game.
- ▶ **Each player makes the same number of moves.** Each game has deadlines and all turns in a game are processed at the same time. A player living in Arizona, or one who is willing to spend lots of money on phone calls can't get in more moves than you.
- ▶ **No hidden fees.** You are only charged the turn fee for each turn. No extra "special actions" or "battle reports." Our players are not attacked by moderator-controlled enemies, then charged a special "battle report" fee for that privilege.
- ▶ **You are on an equal footing with the other players.** Each game has a limited number of players, and every player starts on Turn One (with the exception of *Starlord* and *Heroic Fantasy*, which have special rules). No player is allowed to have more than one position. You don't have to fight players who have been in the game building up for the last three years, and you don't have to fight rich players who "buy" the game by spending hundreds of dollars a month on extra positions and special actions.
- ▶ **You buy the rules first.** We don't allow you to join a game until after you see the rules. We want you to be sure you are interested before you find yourself in the middle of a game.

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



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