

FLAGSHIP

THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE FOR GAMERS



In this issue ...
Atlantic Online
Jurassic Wars
Miniature Wargames
Phoenix
The Golden Coast
Android

General gaming news, views and reviews

middle earth

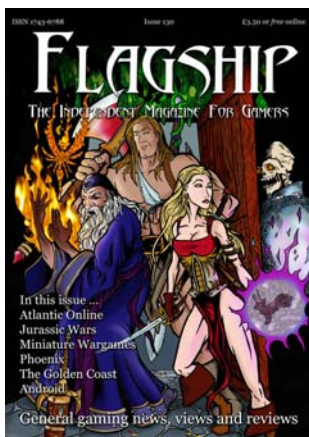
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**Contributions are always
welcome!**

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Report from the Bridge

HELLO AGAIN. Apologies for the delay with this issue: alas, a downturn in Colin's health has meant that promptness was not achievable. I'm grateful to Martin Helsdon for taking on the task of laying out #130. We hope that you will find it worth the unfortunate delay. It will be up on the website even as it hits your mailboxes ...

There's plenty of material, hooray. We've articles about the turn-based games Phoenix and the new Golden Coast section from DungeonWorld. The One Ring is reviewed, too, with the exciting innovation of using Facebook. We've an article about designing the new boardgame Jurassic Wars, a review of the new sci-fi boardgame Android and Pevans' description of games at this year's *Spiel*. Our popular new pseudonymous columnist describes the MMO Atlantic Online and Dev Sodagar continues his coverage of miniatures. Stuart Connor casts a judicious eye at more independent computer games and Shannon Appelcline compares table-top with onscreen play when writing about Thinking Virtually. Something for everyone in this issue, we hope, that'll interest you all.

I always enjoy amassing material because there's always something new to present, together with novel view-points. I appreciate that Flagship works because it's you—players and readers—who send me your thoughts.

With all good wishes for a year of enjoyable and successful games play...

Carol

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Editorial Comment

Games to be Proud Of ...

THE RECESSION'S effects on gaming don't seem to be too dire, yet, and here in the UK there's even talk of reducing taxes for video games firms. *Flagship* reviewers have high standards and are usually able to praise what they've played. I hope that you can all agree that they are right when they are upbeat and that good games still flourish.

2009 was a year of Big Decisions for us: should we transfer *Flagship* to our website? It was good to have so many of you responding and I hope that my compromise of printing enough copies to mail to those of you who prefer a printed version while also putting the issue online will succeed in pleasing everyone. Remember to subscribe as usual if you want a paper version, but it's worth noting that putting the PDF up on our website has trebled our readership. Since postal charges have gone up again, sigh, let's emphasise that the website version is free!

Rick Loomis of *Flying Buffalo Inc* celebrates his firm's 40th anniversary this year, so our congratulations to Rick for designing and marketing one of the best turn-based games ever, **Starweb**. It was into turn-based gaming that *Flagship* first set sail, so our readers owe Rick a debt of gratitude, too. We've widened our coverage to include all types of game since issue #100 and feel we're making a stout job of this, too, but it's worth remarking that our original field had the advantage for new designers of being straightforward and economical to get started in. There were plenty of original, creative games that could be launched and enjoyed for little initial investment by their designers.

Still, nostalgia butters no parsnips, so let's celebrate the variety of all the games that are now available. I hope that we can continue bringing them to you in our pages, whether in print or via the website ...

Finding a good book to read ...

Apologies, but I'm going to seize my editorial privilege to embark on a small moan that doesn't have much to do with games. I love reading: it's always been a favourite activity for me. What I want to rant about here is that I reckon that dramatising good novels for TV or movies seldom works well, because it's almost impossible to capture an author's tone. And golly, directors appear to feel an irresistible urge to prettify what they're representing.

One of the great discoveries of my youth was that Jane Austen didn't write the sort of romances which I'd assumed she had up until I actually read her: instead, I discovered that her voice was a dry, ironic one that soars from the printed page but is seldom captured otherwise. For the first time, I realised that a book could do more than simply tell a story, and it was a revelation to me.

The film of *Pride and Prejudice* a couple of years ago may have won prizes, but it was an ignorant travesty. Has the recent film of Maurice Sendak's perfect children's story, *Where The Wild Things Are*, captured the blend of text and pictures in the book? Can Flora Thompson's account of families struggling with poverty in her *Lark Rise* be adapted for TV without misleading romanticism?

Dramatisation for the cinema or TV screen does not often do justice to a novel. We are usually short-changed by the transfer to a different medium.

It's not that all books are worth reading, of course. If you've tried *The Da Vinci Code* you'll know what I

mean. I feel that I should warn you against Hilary Mantel's historical novel *Wolf Hall*. By basing a novel round such a well-known historical figure as Henry VIII's enforcer, Thomas Cromwell, the author greatly reduced the scope for interesting plot-lines. While the book has been praised and its prose is good, it is painfully slow to get moving, and I didn't find Cromwell himself—who was clearly a ruthless operator—plausible. I bought it because I'd enjoyed CJ Sansom's series starting with *Dissolution*, which is set in the same period. Read *Dissolution* instead.

Yes, novelists make mistakes, but I suspect that film-makers are too arrogant to see that it doesn't always benefit a novel to turn it into a movie. Cinema is not invariably a superior art-form to novels, where the writer is still in control.

It would, of course, be closer to this magazine's subject-matter to discuss films based on games. Do readers have comments on what movie-makers have made out of **Lara Croft: Tomb Raider** (Angelina Jolie was worth the ticket, I reckon) and **Doom**? I don't have a happy memory of **Dungeons and Dragons**: splendid CGI dragons, but a bellowing villain. They won't be the last games to get the movie treatment. Indeed, **Prince of Persia** is planned to come out in May: let's hope that this will convey something of the real joy of playing this game.

Carol

Media Eye

It must be true—it was in the papers and on TV ...

TABLOID scares about ‘unsuitable’ video games don’t last long, though maybe this is because there’s always a new one looming. In November it was *Activision’s Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* that gained the alarmed reportage. Journalists don’t seem to appreciate that there’s often a vast difference in subject-matter and tone between games aimed at juveniles and those marketed for adults. No-one makes the same mistake about books, after all.

What especially alarmed the easily-alarmingly about *Call of Duty* is an episode where you have infiltrated a terrorist group presented with the option of slaughtering civilians in an attack on an airport: do you break your cover by holding back? Not a pleasant choice, admittedly, but the game is clearly labelled for 18-year olds only, and players are asked at the beginning if they are easily offended, in which case the airport task is withdrawn. Labour MP Keith Vaz often decries video games and is said to have reacted by saying that he’s ‘absolutely shocked’ by the level of violence here. Labour MP Tom Watson, however, disagrees strongly enough to have set up a *Facebook* page entitled *Gamers Voice*, defending the video games industry.

www.gamersvoice.com/login

A news item that struck me as bizarre was a report on the BBC’s news website for November 23rd. Apparently two Swiss human rights organisations, *Trial* and *Pro Juventute*, studied video wargames to see if any broke the humanitarian laws which define what is a war crime in real life. They played around 20 games, including *Army of Two*, *Call of Duty 5*, *Far Cry 2* and *Conflict Desert Storm*, for their report, which stated that ‘the practically complete absence of rules or sanctions is astonishing’. Games were chosen for the study because of their interactivity, ‘Thus, the line between the virtual and real experience becomes blurred and the game becomes a simulation of real-life situations on the battle-field...’ They recommend that players be warned that their activities are subject to humanitarian laws and that if their characters transgress these then they become subject to trial as war criminals rather than victors.

Well, I don’t know anyone who plays wargames who thinks that he’s taking part in a real war. However convincing the artwork may be, bullets and shrapnel don’t really fly out of our screens around our heads. If we totally identified with our avatars, we would rather sit watching the telly than fight, as would real-life soldiers. It’s the imaginary nature of these games that gives them their appeal. But doing the research for this report does sound like a lot more fun than most research work ...

On December 17th, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article about Silicon Valley executives choosing to relax by playing **Settlers of Catan** after techie conferences. The game is seen to be appropriate because it ‘most closely approximates entrepreneurial strategy’ while providing delegates with social interaction ‘after sitting all day in front of a monitor’. Not that this is entirely the case, of course: one executive was so determined to learn how to win the game after losing his first match that he turned to an online version and admits to having ‘ended up playing 200 online games in three nights’.

I was delighted to watch intelligent programmes about games on BBC 4 in December. Called *Games Britannia*, it was splendidly presented by historian Benjamin Woolley as a three-part series.

Woolley described the history of games in Britain with all sorts of fascinating detail. Games, he said, are ‘not just fun, but fundamental’ to our society. The earliest known game in Britain is a board with glass counters laid out on it; discovered in an Iron Age burial site, it may have had some kind of symbolic value to the dead man. Indeed, many games would once have had deeper symbolic meanings—perhaps being used for divination, rather than simply to pass the time. I didn’t know that **Snakes & Ladders** is based on a Hindu game where players seek to attain enlightenment: the snakes and the ladders represented a religious path.

This symbolism is an age-old aspect of gaming that has been overlooked by modern commercial interests; the programme itself was much more interesting than my hurried summary indicates!

When the city council in Derby, UK, polled residents to name a new stretch of the inner ring road, 89% chose Lara Croft Way. The firm which devised **Tomb Raider**, *Core Designs*, is based in Derby. It’s good to see that a game character can gather enough local support to achieve real-world commemoration!

The work that video games firms are doing to help British exports is set to earn new tax breaks, with the Chancellor describing the industry as ‘growing, with half its sales coming from exports, and we need to keep British talent in this country.’ The official statement says that the industry contributes £1bn a year to the economy.

On a darker note, though, the BBC news site reports that a Bulgarian official was sacked after being caught milking a virtual cow ‘on the hugely popular online gaming game **Farmville**.’ We reviewed this last issue and should stress that it’s a harmless enough game, though maybe not for playing in office time.

Phoenix: Rising Again

An open-ended game from the ashes of *Beyond the Stellar Empire*

TED PRATT reviews this re-written and revived turn-based game ...

[In issue #128, *KJC*'s Mica Goldstone described the history of the **Phoenix**, which springs from a total re-write of its original, **Beyond the Stellar Empire**. Now Ted Pratt reviews the game ...]

PHOENIX IS AN open ended sci-fi role-playing game in which players can choose to be part of an affiliation and use various assets such as starships, starbases, ground parties, outposts and agents/operatives to further their own goals and that of their affiliation within the game.

In December 2002, *KJC Games*' new game program totally changed the game, for the better. Now players could download an offline order editor which from *KJC*'s website. This could be used to issue orders, then upload them directly to *KJC* where the computer would process the turns and sent out the results via email. More recently, *KJC* has introduced their Nexus website. Although still waiting for a few finishing touches Nexus has taken the game to a new level again. The site includes various forums where players can discuss issues both in and out of character.

Affiliations can create their own internal forums away from the prying eyes of the rest of the galaxy. The game rules are shown in a library section of Nexus and again affiliations each have their own library sections that they can use how they wish. A new order editor is also available, and a page showing all the last turn results of a player's positions. Then we have the player's data archive. All the in-game knowledge that a player learns about during play is recorded here. It includes star maps and the various items that are part of the game. Nexus also lists all the starbase trade markets, so players can see where the most profitable trading is to be done. Phoenix has become a true web interface game, although the old options of using the offline editor and receiving email results are still available to those who prefer that method.

One of the biggest advantages I find in all this new development is that *KJC* have been able to allow players to run positions such as starships, ground parties, outposts and a couple of other position types free of charge. You could play the game using nothing but ships to conduct trading and never have to pay a

Phoenix at a glance ...

A turn-based space game from *KJC Games*. Starship positions are free, with charges for more advanced positions like bases.

www.kjcgames.com

penny to *KJC*.

Getting started

On joining the game you start off with a small cargo ship, a hold full of trade goods and a few stellars (the game currency) and find yourself in the Yank star system, an area of neutral space where combat is illegal, although accidents and pirate activity do occur. You will also find that you have been placed in a random affiliation (aff) and all the contact details for that aff's Periphery Director (PD) will be shown on the first turn printout. It is advisable to contact the PD to introduce yourself and to ask for advice, as it can be quite confusing as to what to do first. Newly arrived star captains can if they wish leave their assigned aff to either join another or try to make their way in life as an independent (IND), although this can be dangerous as there are a few INDies that operate as cover for pirate activities and most affs will shoot an IND on sight in star systems they control. Most aff PDs are happy to give new players a run down on their affs and sometimes offer incentives to join them such as additional ships and better equipment.

Phoenix is run every day, Monday to Friday. Each week has 300 Time Units (TUs). Positions such as ships, ground parties and operatives use up TUs as they go about their business. For example, to jump to a different star system costs 100TU. To buy, sell, pick up or deliver items to another position normally costs 10TUs per transaction. Moving around star systems also costs TUs, the amount depending on what type of engines the ship has. You can issue orders to your position which will be processed in the order written until that position uses up all its accumulated TUs: no position can use more than 300TUs per week. Most players wait until their positions accumulate 300TUs and have the ship conduct all its actions in one go, then wait again for the TUs to build up before issuing more orders. You also have the option of issuing a lot of orders that will keep the ship busy for weeks on end.

The game program moves the position until it runs out of TUs, then stops the turn until 300TUs have accumulated and then automatically runs any pending orders that were issued. Very useful for those long haul cargo runs, as you can issue orders then forget about the ship to concentrate on other things and receive a turn when the ship next moves.

You can play Phoenix free of charge having your ships conduct trade with player-run starbases or engage in combat if you wish, but the game gets better for

players willing to open a paying account with KJC. Ships can conduct exploration of planets and other areas of space. This is where the GM moderation comes to the fore, in the form of special actions (SAs). Players interested in exploration can order ships to land on a planetary surface (planets are divided into sectors and are of varying sizes) and conduct a surface exploration. This will give a standard description of the type of terrain in that sector and a summary of anything else discovered.

Here is an example of such an exploration from a sea sector of a planet in the game:

This area is dominated by a dark and lifeless sea of free water. There are a number of impurities found in it, most of which are completely useless. A closer analysis of the water would be needed in order to identify any that may prove of some use.

If you want to conduct any follow-up investigations, you can order a SA to find out more about the area. In the above example I ordered a SA to conduct a closer analysis of the water to see if there was anything useful. I won't publish the result here as there was and I don't want to give any secrets away!

Ships can also be ordered to look for mineral resources. Using sensors, they can scan planets for the various types of minerals that are needed for production conducted at starbases. Once a mineral is found the ship can then prospect the deposit to get its exact yield and the actual amount of ore available. If you think its worth while, you can set up an outpost to exploit the deposit. These are a position somewhat like a starbase only smaller and are limited in what orders can be issued to them. Normally they are set up to exploit a mineral deposit or another type of exploitable resource found on a planet. The good thing about outposts is that once established and initial orders given to exploit the resource you can ignore it, only sending a ship to collect the exploited materials whenever you like. Again these positions are free to run, but a small charge is levied if you request an update for them.

Starbases

These are the powerhouses of the game. This type of position does cost real money to run each week, so only players with an account can operate them.

Starbases are comprised of a number of complexes of various kinds: Command, Factory, Merchandising, Research, Mines and a few others. These positions can set up public markets, selling items such as local trade goods, manufactured items and the like and buying goods from other planets and star systems shipped in by other players or your own freighters. Bases can also interact with local populations if the planet has any.

Using merchandising complexes the base can sell trade goods to the locals and each merchandising

complex generates an income for the owner through broker fees on trade between the local inhabitants. You don't need to do anything to generate this income as each planet has its own economic stats and you can work out how much income each merchandising complex will generate based on those stats. Every planetary population has a finite amount of money each week to spend on goods offered by starbases. Again the owner just has to use the *sell to local population* order to place goods on the planetary market and the locals will buy the amount they can afford each week. Goods from off world have a higher value than locally produced goods, so a smart owner will offer good buy prices on his public market to entice ship captains to sell their goods to them.

Bases are also the manufacturing centres of the game. Using factories bases can produce any item that you know about, so long as the base has the required raw materials in stock. Each factory can produce a limited amount of items per week measured in mass units (MUs), but there is a diminished return. For example, the first ten factories each produce 50MUs per week, the next ten produce 40MUs, then 30MUs, 20MUs and any remaining factories 10MUs each per week.

Each item in the game has a size again measured in MUs. Modules, the component parts needed to construct complexes are 40MUs in size. As well as the item's size, each has a raw materials requirement. Basic modules, for example, require 40MUs of metals to produce. Higher tech versions of items are smaller in size, but do need more exotic and rare materials. Basic modules mark two require 25 metals and 5 rare earth elements, but are only 30MUs in size.

A base can overcome the diminishing returns on production by setting up a mass production line to produce an item. You have to allocate a minimum of ten factories to mass produce an item and each factory will make 45MUs of production per week. Adding more factories to the line will increase the amount of production: the next ten factories will produce 50MUs each per week. Once set up, a mass production line will continue to produce the item each week without further orders, as long as the base has the required materials. Even if the materials run out, the line will stand idle and automatically start up again once the materials are available.

Bases can recruit members of the local populations to work in the base as most complexes require 500 man hours to operate at peak efficiency each week. Every worker contributes 50 man hours per week, so complexes need ten workers to operate. There are some exceptions to this rule: dome complexes, for example, don't require employees and research complexes need 50 employees to function. The base can also recruit mercenaries from the indigenous population and can then use the basic training complexes to convert them to the various troop types in the game, such as crew for

ships, marines, soldiers, scouts and startroopers. Of course, all of this costs money in the form of stellars: each worker and troop expects to be paid at least one stellar per week. Workers and troops located at outposts expect 1.5 stellars per week to compensate them for being assigned to a backwater asset.

Another aspect of the game that is done at bases is research. Using research complexes a base can research in various areas. Most items in the game can be improved upon. There are three levels of research: first we have Principles, which are the foundations of all research. There are too many to mention here, but include things such as Energetics and Cybernetics. From these Principles bases can then look into researching higher tech level principles and/or techniques. For example, if a base has researched Energetics it can then go on to researching a Photon Beam Weaponry technique. Next, we have Blueprints (BPs). Again if a base has Photon Beam Weaponry, it can then produce BPs for the different types of standard photon weapons. These BPs are needed at a base if it wants to build the items specified in the BPs.

Research doesn't happen overnight. It is time consuming and expensive for a base to conduct, but very rewarding. You aren't restricted to the standard research lines. If you can come up with a good idea for a new item or ship design you can use a SA to ask the GM if it's feasible and he'll let you know what line of research is needed. There are a few new items out there that have occasionally taken players by surprise the first time they were used: Cloaked Kinetic Missiles spring to mind!

Political positions

You can also run a political position. This is your in game persona and is an actual position located in the game area. You create it using a crewmember of your ship or another troop type if you have them.

There are several advantages to having a political. First is that on creation KJC will give the player two more ships, a medium sized freighter and an escort ship to go with it. Also, a political position is paid 10000 stellars per week as an incentive. Another advantage is that a political position has a central stellar account. This means that all the money a political has is in one place. Before that, each position a player controlled had to carry its own fund--very inconvenient if you lost a position for some reason.

There are certain orders that only a political position can use, such as creating squadrons. This is very useful. You create a squadron and can add as many ships as you want to it. Then you can issue squadron orders to one ship and the rest follow. Great for setting up freighter convoys or warfleets.

Ground parties and orbital platforms

Other position types include ground parties. These are comprised of various troop types and other item types

such as tanks, artillery and the like and are used primarily to assault enemy starbases.

Operatives recruited from veteran troops can be dropped into enemy locations to conduct all sorts of espionage missions.

Orbital platforms are used to defend areas of space and are packed with space weaponry. Players normally construct these in orbit of their major bases and if they have the resources can add to them over time. There are some truly monstrous platforms in the game.

Combat

There are three areas of combat in the game: space combat, which involves ship to ship (orbital platforms included) and in some cases ship to base in the form of orbital bombardment; ground combat where ground parties assault bases; lastly, boarding where one ship attempts to lock onto another and capture it using boarding parties comprised of troops. Not surprisingly, marines work best for this.

Each position in the game has several lists to which it can add other items. These include Enemy, Support, Defend, Ground Enemy and Do Not Target.

As you'd expect anyone you want to attack can be added to your enemy list. Players have the option to add individual positions or the positions of whole affs to their lists. Of course, you would add your allies to the support and defend categories.

Combat is conducted one per day. As positions move, the various lists are checked by the game program and if a battle is indicated all movement for those positions is stopped for the day and a battle occurs.

Battles are played out to a maximum of four rounds, each side manoeuvring and firing at their enemies depending on how they had set up the ships' combat options beforehand. Again, once these options are set up you can forget about them until you want to set them up differently. Options include specifying whether to try to disengage from combat and targeting specific areas of your enemies' ships such as engines, weapons or structural damage.

Ships in combat use various types of weaponry and defensive items. We have energy weapons of differing types, like missiles, torpedoes and space fighters. Defensive items include shields, armour plating and point defence weapons like gatling lasers and phalanx missiles. To use these items, ships are fitted with sensors and targeting computers, each giving bonuses to accuracy and coupled with a weapon's inherent accuracy modifier they give a total bonus that is used to calculate whether a target is hit or not. Off-setting this is combat speed and target silhouette. The program does all the calculations and determines the amount of damage the target has suffered.

Players who were involved in the combat receive a battle report showing all the details of the combat on a round by round basis. They can then if they wish issue

orders to their positions to either continue with the combat or move out the following day.

Assaulting a base is somewhat difficult. A well defended location will probably be using shield complexes to enhance its shield strength to the point where most space weaponry will just bounce off it (but shields do deteriorate each round as they take damage unless enough generators are used to keep them intact). The down side for the base is that it can't use space weaponry to shoot back, but can use point defense weapons. So if the owner is smart, bases will have a few orbital platforms to use as top cover, harassing enemy ships causing mischief.

The best way to take on a base is with ground parties. You have to assemble enough troops and equipment and transport it all to the target base. This could take several ships and needs a lot of coordination with other players. Once the ground party is dropped into the target's starport, combat will commence against the defending troops. Again ground combat is conducted over four rounds every day. Each round both sides' control factors are checked (each troop type has a control factor) to determine how much of the base they have captured or defended. If one side has an overwhelming superiority in CFs the base will either be captured or the attackers driven off. Battles in starbases can take several days or even weeks to resolve, each side trying to deliver reinforcements: all the time the base is taking collateral damage to its complexes.

Boarding actions are very much like attacks against bases, each side using CFs to determine the outcome. Normally these actions are over in one day.

Affiliations

All of the above is mainly the pure game mechanics. Where Phoenix really shines is the affiliations.

Most players belong to an affiliation. There are several different types and their members give each a distinctive character.

There are government types such as the Imperial Services (IMP), Detinus Republic (DTR) and Confederate Naval Forces (CNF). Alien affs include Flagritz (FLZ), truly alien with lots of tentacles; Falconians (FCN), an Avian race; Dewiek Elder Nation (DEN), a canine race, and several more alien affs. There are also affiliations set up as mega-corporations such as Frontier, Exploration and Trade (FET). I'm the FET PD so am a bit biased!

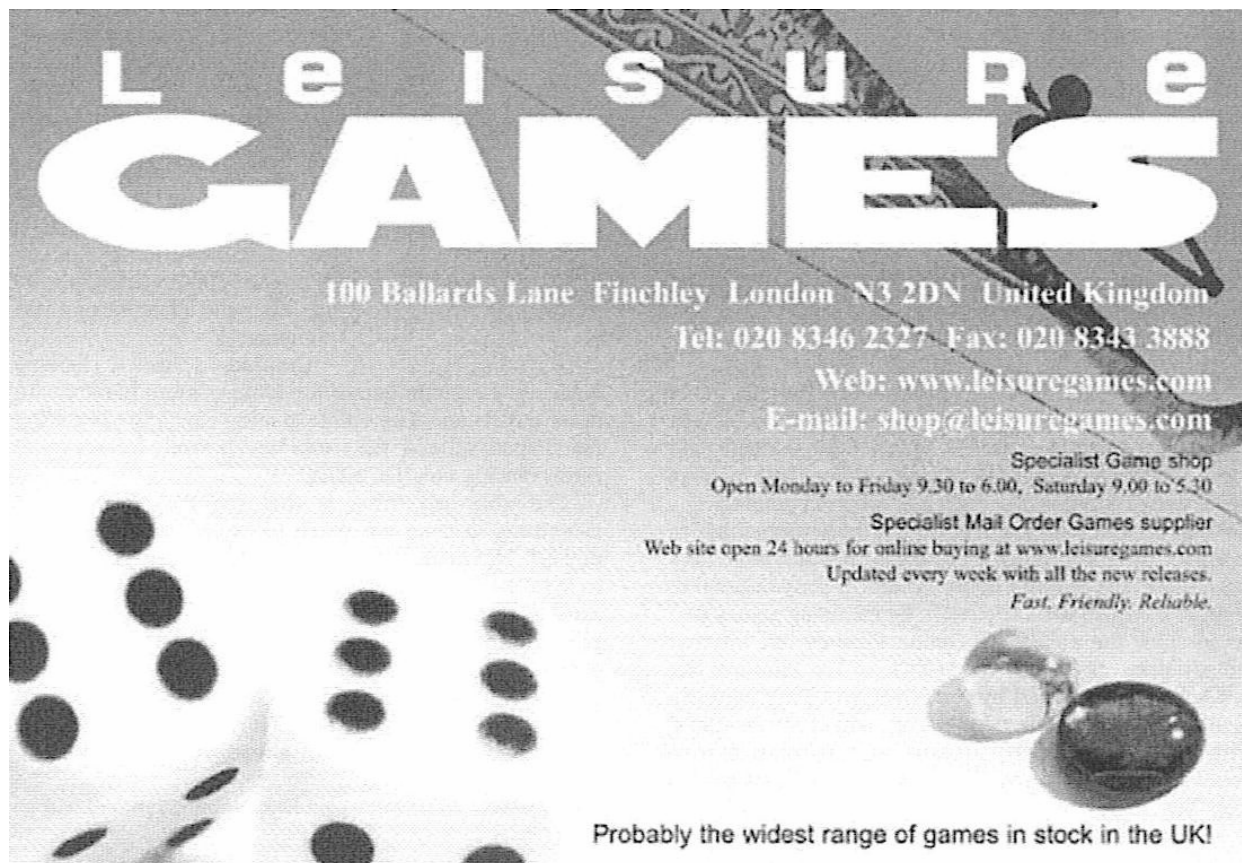
Affiliations sometimes ally with others and form distinct political blocs. For example, the Imperial bloc consists of the IMP, FET and another mega-corp aff known as Galactic Trade and Transport (GTT).

The political landscape is always changing, as alliances are formed then dissolved.

The roleplaying of all players on the forum is excellent and can sometimes get quite heated. I actually spend more time roleplaying than submitting orders.

All in all, an excellent game with a few more upgrades coming along including more interaction possibilities with planetary populations.

I can thoroughly recommend Phoenix. This review cannot really cover all of the game's many aspects. Do give it a go.



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The Ridley Files

Penny Arcade, Power Grid: Factory Manager, Warhammer Invasion

ERIC RIDLEY plays and reports on these three games ...

Penny Arcade

PENNY ARCADE is a web phenomenon that has spawned several spin-offs, clothing lines, *Playstation* games and now a card game from *Fantasy Flight Games*. The intellectual property revolves around two gaming losers called Gabe and Tycho as they attempt to batter each other into a ruby pulp over a Pac-man wrist watch(?). If you weren't aware of all this to begin with then let me be the first to scorn you on your lack of popular culture knowledge. You type of people make me sick, get a life and learn to love *I'm a Celebrity*. I'm off to buy the new Susan Boyle album; she has the voice of an angel you know!

OK, I'm back. The game is basically a two-player Trading Card Game put into a single box. It consists of two sixty-card decks, one for each character, made up of all the standard attacks, items and events. Each character has a Health (how many hits you can take), strength (how many attacks you can do) and intellect value (how many events you can play and also how many cards you draw) printed on their card. Your hand will be made up of mainly attacks. Each one has a cost; you can only play a total value of attacks up to your strength stat. That usually means you can play about three attacks per turn if you have them. The attack cards

also have a damage value, which, if the attack is successful, is predictably taken from your opponent's health.

Items are cards that stay on the table and grant you status boosts like an extra point of intellect and so on. They are useful but not game breaking. I guess that's the point of such a card in a static environment such as a standalone game. It actually hints at the fact that this is a well play-tested game. That extends to all the cards. There are, of course, some cards more powerful than others, but nothing that you get your hands on will allow you to win the game just by its presence.

Hijinx cards are 'event' cards that allow you to bend the rules a little. Some allow you to take cards from your discard; others allow you to re-order the top cards of your deck and so on. They are useful, but again not game breakers.

The game's cleverest mechanic comes in the form of blocking. Each time your mortal enemy throws an attack at you, you have a chance to block it. A lot of cards have a 'block number' in the top corner. If you play one of these cards in response to an attack then you have the chance of stopping the damage. The block number tells you how many cards you can turn over from the top of your deck. If any of the cards that you flop have a 'success' icon in the bottom right then you manage to block the attack, presumably by firing a flame thrower into your opponent's face or by flipping a pan of hot oil into their crotch. The rules don't state this but I presume that's the case.

The game continues apace until one player's health is reduced to zero. The remaining fighter is then free to mock, pour scorn on and verbally abuse the loser until he or she is hit or another game is started. It's all quite enjoyable. The game's mechanics are reminiscent, but in no way a copy, of the **Universal Fighting System** card game also by *Fantasy Flight Games*. If you played and liked that, then give this one a try. If you are a big fan of Penny Arcade in any of its forms then you are likely to also get a kick from this game. If you are neither then the attractive art and thick card stock may appeal to you, but will probably not change your gaming life. It is a solid fighting game that two players can enjoy a number of times, but not one of the 100 games you should play before you die (via barbed wire chair shot to the back of the head). Oh and it turns out that Susan Boyle's album was just a load of over hyped dribble. Shame on you for being fooled.

Penny Arcade at a glance ...

Price £20
Published by Fantasy Flight Games
Time 20 mins
Players two

Power Grid: Factory Manager At a glance ...

Price £30--£35
Publisher: Rio Grande
Play time 1 hour

Warhammer Invasion at a glance ...

Price £30
Published by *Fantasy Flight Games*
Time 30mins
Players two (officially, but it can easily play more)

Power Grid: Factory Manager

FOR THOSE OF you who haven't played it, **Power Grid** is a game which sees you build power plants in cities across a map in an attempt to supply as much power as possible to a country. It's a great game that was released in 2004 by *Rio Grande Games*. It also sold a lot of copies. Roll on 2009 and another game designed by Friedemann Friese and published by the same company. **Power Grid: Factory Manager** shares nothing in common with the original game, save its industrial theme, and so it feels a little like a profit-driven cash-in to call and theme it 'Power Grid'.

Despite my wish to continue bemoaning the modern capitalist world, I should really tell the loyal readers what they want to hear. **Factory Manager** is very much a 'perfect knowledge' Euro game. That is that all players have almost complete information on what options they have open to them on their turn. Players attempt to build the most profitable factory possible over the course of five rounds. Each participant has a board in front of them that represents their factory floor. They have the option every turn of buying more machines to make products and more storage to store goods. Players also have a certain number of workers available to them (seven) and the ability to hire more 'seasonal' workers (an extra two). Each item you buy costs money, takes up one of your actions and requires workers to operate. Over the course of the game you will battle to manage your resources and maximize output while at the same time trying to keep down energy usage.

I could go into a long description here about exactly how the mechanics of the game are carried out, but really, that's the job of the rules leaflet. Speaking of which, I have played a lot of games and learned a lot of rules in my time, but this set seemed particularly intimidating. In truth, the game play is not particularly complex, and certainly no more so than a lot of other games, but it just took a long time to get my head round these ones. I'm sure that if you had a mate explain the game to you you'd pick it up in no time, but they took me quite some time to unravel.

So the game is not too difficult, but the strategy is as deep as the black hole of Calcutta. In each of the five turns you will be wrestling with what items to buy and how best to manage your work force. This is the very definition of a resource management game. Finite money, finite workers, a finite amount of space and a limited number of turns to put all your plans into motion. It's all very tense and more than a little head scratching is required sometimes to get the most out of your workforce.

Each turn players have workers available to them. Some are left in the factory to work the machines (each machine tile tells you how many must operate it) and your unused staff can be sent out to purchase new machines. There is a large central pool of items from which to choose. Players take turns at putting a number

of item tiles into the central buying pool equal to their number of available workers. They then take it in turn to buy and then place in their factory some of the tiles they have available to them. You have to balance the output of your machines with the storage space you have.

When you look at the board as a passerby it can seem a little daunting, but literally, if you sit down to play one turn you will know all the rules and can then just focus on the strategy. As an added bonus the whole package is designed to look like the **Power Grid** box and so therefore sits on your shelf in a most eye pleasing way (this is in opposition to my complaints at the start of the review, I'm a fickle pickle).

I like this game. It's tactical, attractive, deep, balanced and very well designed. But it also shares a fair amount in common with other games (**Industrial Waste** in particular). That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean that if you have a lot of management games in your collection then you need not buy this one unless it really turns you on. I can't stress enough that it is a good, solid game of thinking that will entertain you for an hour at a time. I personally am eager to play more games of it, a good sign obviously, but I am fanatical games player, so if you only play once in a while, you will have to keep re-learning the rules and figuring it all out again. If you are still undecided, maybe this will sway you. The rules come with a rather dashing picture of the games designer, green hair and all. One for the ladies perhaps, but it's nice to see him all the same.

Warhammer Invasion

WHAT IF SOMEONE came up with a magical new way to squeeze even more money from the **Warhammer** games licence? What if, instead of armies of toy soldiers to push around a lush table top you were offered card versions of some of the most famous units from wargaming history? What if, instead of being gouged for hundreds of pounds for 'white metal' game pieces, you were charged hundreds of pounds for cardboard ones instead? Well ponder these questions no longer, for the answer is upon us. *Fantasy Flight Games* have devised a way to do the above and more with the new **Warhammer Invasion Living Card Game**.

A Living Card Game is just like a regular TCG in all ways except its distribution. Every month there is a set of 40 cards released. These are packaged in a single small box and you can buy the whole box for around £8. No more shelling out hundreds of pounds in order to collect a whole set. No more frustration at spending £3 on a booster full of cards you already have. Just the simple joy of expanding your game monthly with cards you are guaranteed a full set of. Simple.

The **Warhammer LCG** is a new game designed by Eric Lang. I'm not ashamed to admit to having played almost 50 different TCGs, ok, I'm ashamed to admit it (but not within the venerable pages of *Flagship*

Magazine), and I know a lot about them. This game has many of the standard mechanics available to it as any other card flopper. Tactics cards are just 'event' cards that do what they say on them and are then discarded. Support cards are effects that stay in play. Units are your basic warriors that you use to crush your opponent. A lot of the things in this game are similar to all the other ones out there. With one brilliant exception.

The aim of the game is to destroy two sections of your opponent's Capital. You start with a Capital board that represents your city. There are three sections to your city: the Kingdom, Quest and Battlefield sides. Each area can take eight hits before the ninth one destroys it. Most Unit and Support cards have a hammer symbol on them. This is the most important symbol in the game. It represents your unit's power. Each hammer they have represents one power and so can be used to smash your opponent's capital, but can also be used in more subtle ways in order to give you advantages with card draw and resources.

Your Kingdom is what allows you to gain resources. For every hammer icon you have on your Kingdom side of your Capital, you are given one resource: you start with three of them printed on the board guaranteeing you three resources per turn. You are allowed to deploy units to any of your three sides (Kingdom, Quest or Battlefield). If you play powerful characters on your Kingdom side, you are given more resources. If you play them on the Quest side, the side responsible for drawing cards, you are allowed to draw as many cards as there are hammer icons on that side. If you play your units on your Battlefield side, you may attack your opponent's Capital. And therein lies the game's brilliance. You are in control of your own game at all points. Do you want to get lots of resources? But what is the point of that if you are only drawing one card per turn when you could be drawing more? If you focus on that, however, you are not focusing on beating your opponent from the Battlefield side. It's tactical and it's brilliant. Every card you get is an opportunity to drive the game forward to your end. Every choice you make has ramifications on every other turn.

Combat plays much like combat in any other card game. Elect your units from your Battlefield with which you wish to attack. Select a side you wish to attack, then your opponent gets a chance to put his own units in your way. After that, both of you can play Tactic cards (events) that may swing the battle. It's pretty standard stuff, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. If a system works, don't change it for the sake of being different. For every hammer you have on your attacking force that is not stopped by your opponent, you may deal one point of damage to the appropriate side of their Capital. More strategy is derived from trying to figure out the best side to play your units to gain an advantage, but also which side is most important to defend.

It's an amazing card game that will appeal to TCG

fans whether they have heard of Warhammer or not. In terms of a conversion of the tabletop game, they don't share much in common. Formations don't come into it, neither do charges nor troop movement. Victory points are not an issue. In fact, apart from the units and card names there is precious little to remind you of it being a Warhammer licence. This is not a bad thing. If I wanted a game in which I could set up pincer movements and march blocking, then I could play Warhammer itself. As a card game I can hardly recommend it highly enough. It is easily my favourite card game for a number of years and seems to have legs that will carry it forward in the easy to collect LCG market.

Being a *Fantasy Flight* game the production values are typically brilliant. The art is evocative and in keeping with the canon that *Games Workshop* has established over so many years. The card stock they have used for the cards and the counters are just right for both. If you are thinking of jumping in, and I suggest you do if you have any interest in card games, then you will need to purchase the box set of the game.

It costs about £30 and comes with just enough cards for four decks. Warhammer Invasion also has the brilliant ability to let you figure out who smells dirtier, card gamers or wargamers. My money's on the card boys!



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Thinking Virtually: Coca-Cola or Pepsi?

SHANNON APPELCLINE compares tabletop with computer RPGs ...

COMPUTER or Tabletop RPG? The question could easily become a religious conflict. Like McDonald's or Burger King. And the Giants or the Dodgers. And Coca-Cola or Pepsi.

I understand *why* some RPGers react so strongly against computer role-playing games. It's because computer games threaten our hobby. They've sucked away players who might have joined our industry and have made second-tier gaming companies struggle to survive. Despite that, I hope to be able to take an unbiased view toward computer games in this column, and hope that I can get a number of *Flagship* readers to join me in that neutral assessment. Because, computer RPGs open up possibilities that cannot occur in tabletop RPGs, and that's a pretty exciting thing.

I want to look at both tabletop and computer RPGs in turn. Because of the unique advantages of each medium, they're very good at doing somewhat different things; I want to explore that. In addition, I'd like to talk a little bit about the similarities of the two mediums, primarily as a clever segue to next issue's article.

So, let's get started.

Tabletop RPGs: The Virtue of Physicality

The main advantage of tabletop RPGing is pure physicality. You get to hang out with your friends and play a game together. When you're gaming, you can see hope, despair, or confusion writ large across your friends' faces. This level of socialization and emotion cannot be matched when you have a computer sitting in between yourself and your friends, acting as a mediator.

With physicality, however, comes physical constraint. Most tabletop RPG groups have a fairly small group of players to draw from. My own groups have sunk as low as three or four players on occasion. Life is good for gamers in the Bay Area, but I suspect physical constraints make it much harder to gather together a group in less urbanized areas.

Time can also be a pretty big constraint. Groups can only gather together when everyone actually has time, and that's caused the demise of many a gaming group, as high school and college turn into the real world and with it jobs and family.

The combined advantages and disadvantages of physicality have produced a specific gameplay for tabletop RPGing that works very well. I'm sure we're all quite familiar with it. Play is group-oriented. Though players do have their individual stories, these stories tend to be subservient to or intertwined with the overall group story. Detours into individual stories are exactly that--detours--and very soon the group story returns to

center stage.

Tabletop RPGs tend to have a single, core storyteller. The need to have something new to run every week (or however often you manage to meet) requires there to be a single responsible person, and once a single person is telling the story it becomes very difficult for another player with cool ideas to pop in for a few hours just to offer up a neat tale he's been considering.

So we end up with the singularly-visioned group-oriented story being the heart of tabletop RPGing. I think **Dungeons & Dragons** is really the prime example of this type of gaming, particularly in its original incarnation as an homage to *The Lord of the Rings*. Consider Gandalf leading that group of hobbits, dwarves, and hanger-ons eastward toward Mordor and the Cracks of Doom, all as envisioned by Professor Tolkien. *That* is tabletop role-playing.

And before I move on I should note that the particular style of play created in tabletop RPGing has brought with it additional advantages, including solid plot-driven stories and a consistency of worldview.

Computer RPGs: The Virtue of Virtuality

I'm sure the above conclusions really didn't surprise anyone. Though we might never have really thought it out, we all *know* what makes for good tabletop roleplaying. The question is: what makes for good computer roleplaying?

I should note in passing, I'm not really talking about those old games that I mentioned last week, like **Adventure** and the first computer **Dungeons & Dragons** game. They shared some of the characteristics of tabletop RPGing--including a fantasy setting and the ability to solve puzzles, kill monsters, and find loot--but they weren't actual roleplaying games. They were just a necessary step around the road. I'm not even talking about games like **Baldur's Gate** or **Might & Magic XXVII**, which I think each miss out on at least one of the core ingredients of a roleplaying game.

(I'll get to them a bit later, but I think the central things that have to be part of roleplaying games--no matter what the medium--are roleplaying, storytelling, and socialization.)

When I talk about computer roleplaying I'm really talking about a genre of games that is just coming to exist. MUDs and MUSHes dabbled in the genre for a couple of decades but it's only really recently that games that meet my definition of true computer roleplaying have really come into the public eye. **Neverwinter Nights** and the recent **Vampire** game are

both great attempts to really carry roleplaying over to the medium of computers.

But, *any computer game that solely tries to mirror the gameplay elements of tabletop RPGs in the computer medium will ultimately fail*. That's a pretty strong statement, and I should probably back off of it just a little bit. You *can* use the computer medium to run tabletop RPGs and it might work out OK. It'll only be a pale reflection of a tabletop RPG, but that's better than not getting to play a tabletop RPG at all if that's the type of gameplay you want. But, you absolutely will not get a computer game that's as emotionally powerful as its tabletop counterpart, and you'll also be wasting the unique opportunities offered to you by the computer medium.

The thing is, computer RPGs have different strengths (and weaknesses) than tabletop RPGs. Just as the primary strength of a tabletop RPG is physicality, the primary strength of a computer RPG is virtuality, and all that comes with it.

With a computer RPG you don't have to gather together a small group of players. The Internet is so mind-bogglingly big that there will be people interested in roleplaying *whenever* you want to play. Even better, with a mass of people all interested in playing, there's no longer pressure for one person to have an 'adventure' planned for the next get-together. In this much more freeform environment there are always people ready to run adventures and that also makes it much easier for a person to run that single two-hour plot that's hard to fit into a tabletop game.

And there's a final advantage that comes up from this mass of intermingling players and gamemasters: stories no longer have to be centered on groups. Gamemasters can interact with players on a one-on-one basis without having to worry about the rest of their players sitting around bored and because computers can facilitate a lot of the action, a player can then set off on his own to accomplish his goals, interacting with the computer and other players before coming back to a gamemaster to report on his success or failure.

The benefits of virtuality result in a totally different version of ideal gameplay from what you see in tabletop games. You can have multiple storytellers offering up multiple stories. Players take part in stories that are much more dynamic because they can constantly interact with different people. And, because games no longer have to be oriented around groups, you can end up with singular heroes, which is much more fulfilling for players. Even better, you can end up with *multiple heroes*; everyone can star in their own story.

(Just to be fair, I should note that virtual gaming does have its own disadvantages: you no longer get the guarantee that an overall storyline will cohere as a whole, and you do lose something by not having the physical presence of other players.)

Surprisingly, I can go back to a tabletop RPG for a prime example of how I think computer RPGs should

run, with their multiply-visioned individual-oriented storylines. **Paranoia**. Its backstabbing machinations really pushed up the individual ... 'heroism'. Its structure, where the Computer gathers together a group of troubleshooters for each episodic adventure, is really a good match for how computer RPGs can be run by individual gamemasters in a dynamic way. Which all might go a little ways to describing why *Paranoia* didn't work as well as a tabletop RPG as *D&D* did.

Different strengths, different weaknesses.

And Often the Twain Shall Meet

Though computer & tabletop RPGs can be very different beasts, they also share certain characteristics which define the genre. I've already listed them in brief: roleplaying, socialization, and storytelling.

Roleplaying is pretty much a no-brainer given the name of the genre. You have to actually put yourself in the frame of mind of a character other than yourself. Sure, they may act a lot like you, but they differ in some way, if for no other reason than because they're in a fantasy (or science-fiction or horrific modern) world. My early computer games, *Adventure and Dungeons & Dragons* failed to meet even this criterion. To be honest, most computer 'RPGs' have. How much roleplaying could you do in **Bard's Tale** or the gold-boxed SSI computer games when you were actually playing an entire party of adventurers?

Except in a few remarkable single-player games you *never* have roleplaying. It doesn't appear until you pick up the second of my criteria: socialization. In my opinion it's only with the advent of the Internet (or, in a more limited fashion, with the advent of older BBS games) that true computer roleplaying game came about, and that was because you could socialize with other people. I actually think that some multiplayer games manage to fail at this criteria as well. How much socialization do you really do in **Diablo** when you're just looking for other people to help hack & slash?

And finally, there's storytelling: the act of actually playing out a plot that causes change and has real consequences. I've played in tabletop and computer RPGs alike that didn't meet this criteria. How much story really managed to make it ways into **The Keep on the Borderlands**? Even though **Warcraft** and its many graphical brethren do have stories behind them, are they really critical or are they just excuses to go to the next fight? In their infancy I think both the tabletop and computer RPG industries managed to consider storytelling a simple add-on--an excuse for the fighting or looting or whatever that was at the core of those first games. We've seen tabletop gaming mature beyond that and I'm sure that computer games are on this path too.

Finally, in response to my initial dichotomy, let me say: Coca-Cola. But if I really wanted a caffeinated beverage that was sugary, slightly acidic, and cold, Pepsi would do at a pinch.

The Making of *Jurassic Wars*

ANTONY BROWN describes how a new boardgame was developed with computer aid ...

ARE YOU A classical or quantum gamer? Classical gamers like control, knowing that the outcome of the game will largely be determined by their decisions and the mistakes of their opponents: their preferred gaming system does not invite fortune to sit at the table. Quantum gamers accept that decisions made during game play can only affect the probability of the outcome but don't determine it: their preferred gaming system is more open to the vagaries of chance.

I am a quantum gamer, myself, with an affinity for that peculiar love of statistician and gambler alike: dice. In this I am not alone. Dice are as old as civilization itself. Our ancestors diced with the gods and believed fate could be foretold in a single throw. Even the course of history has turned on the roll of a die. Julius Caesar's legions crossed the Rubicon only after the die was cast, plunging the Roman Empire into civil war. Such is the mystique and power of dice.

It should come as no surprise that the games we develop are dice-based, although always using custom dice. They can be enjoyed by virtually anyone but are more likely to be won by those who understand a bit about probability and employ tactics to move the odds in their favour. They are aimed at the mass market but experienced gamers should be able to enjoy the games, especially using the advanced rules and different game versions that we publish on our website. The latest game in our range **Jurassic Wars** is no exception. This article explains how the game, which recently won best board/card game in the *ToyTalk* awards, was developed using computer technology.

Dice and dinosaurian

Jurassic Wars uses 20 Dinocards featuring well-known dinosaurs, and seven D6 custom dice ('combat dice'). We use D6 dice not only because they are familiar to the mainstream market but also they are economical when we are committed to manufacturing only in the UK. The game has two types of combat dice--red for carnivores and green for herbivores. As you may

Jurassic Wars at a glance...

Jurassic Wars is published by *Dice Maestro*. It retails for £10.99 and is available from toy and game retailers.

Visit www.dicemaestro.com for stockist list, game resources, interviews and news on expansion packs. *Jurassic Wars* and *Dice Maestro* are registered trademarks of Dice Maestro Limited.

Exhibit 1 – The components of *Jurassic Wars*. Note the box bottom is the dice arena during play.



expect, the red dice are more likely to score a hit against an opposing dinosaur than the green. In fact, the red die has a hit symbol on three of its faces, the green die on only two. This is not an arbitrary configuration but the result of statistical analysis--we will look at this later. First, let's examine the basic combat mechanism and how it evolved.

Initially, *Jurassic Wars* was to have a set of several different types of combat dice with the better combat dice typically being used by carnivore Dinocards, reflecting their greater attacking prowess. The herbivores would typically have a greater number of hit points, reflecting their greater strength. When a dinosaur sustained hits these were to be recorded on the cards themselves (which would be laminated so they could be wiped clean after use). But not only was this tedious and cumbersome--wiping down cards is not a good use of anyone's time--but it also raised production costs by adding extra components. Other mechanisms were considered but were rejected because the additional components increased costs or reduced the portability of the game.

Eventually it was decided the most elegant mechanism was to actually make the *number* of combat dice the store of hit points. Each time a hit is suffered during a combat a die is set aside. This is realistic because, as in nature, a positive feedback loop is set up. The more hits are sustained, the greater the injuries suffered; the greater the injuries suffered, the less likely a dinosaur will score a hit. Clearly, the larger herbivores need to use a greater number of dice to reflect their greater strength but the dice also need to reflect their weaker offensive capability. This necessarily implied two types of dice--red for

carnivores and green for herbivores, with the red dice more capable of producing a hit.

A key design point was to define hits *scored* during a round of combat as the *difference* between the hits rolled by each player. If two players roll the same number of hits then the dice are re-rolled until a difference is obtained when the hits are *scored against* the player with the lower throw. Dice are set aside accordingly and combat resumes until one player has no dice left.

The difference a die makes

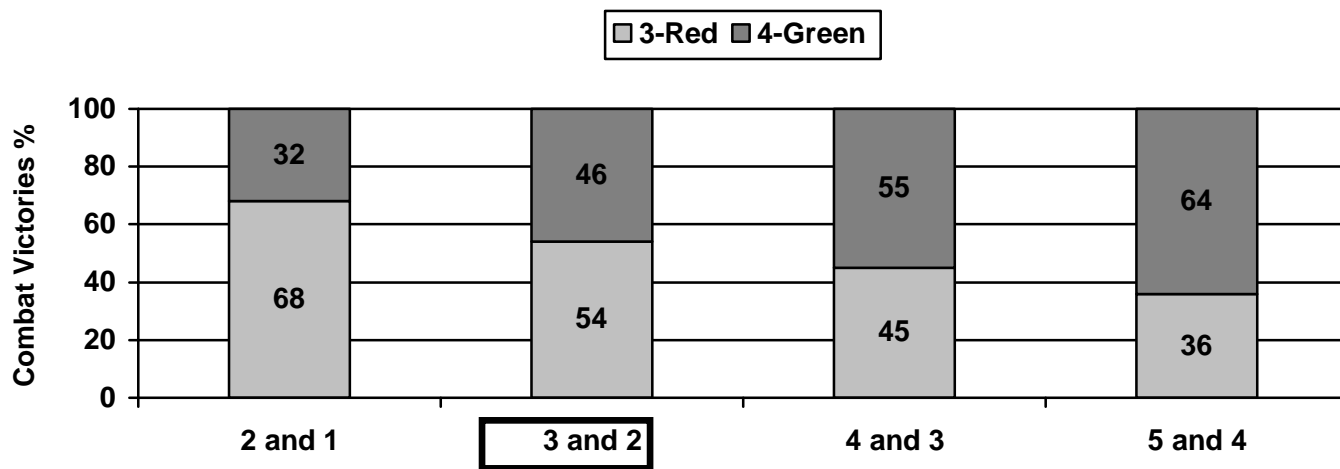
As soon as the basic mechanism was agreed one question loomed large: what is the optimum difference in hits between the two types of dice? For example, why shouldn't the red die be configured for five hits and the green for four? For this answer we turned to computer technology.

It's probably no exaggeration to claim that Jurassic Wars is one of the most tested modern games in history: over 10 million combats were simulated by computer even before the first prototype was developed. The kernel of a dice-based game mechanism is easy to model and can be programmed on any computer using a compiled language. The

simulation is invaluable because it provides the game designers with a full sensitivity analysis on game parameters.

One of the parameters tested was the configuration of the combat dice. For example, take the combat between a dinosaur with a dice rating of 3-Red (ie a player starting combat with three red dice) and 4-Green. These are the highest dice ratings in Jurassic Wars and are used by the most fearsome carnivores and best-defended herbivores respectively. It was important for game integrity that this combat should be close and the edge, if any, rest with the carnivore. It would be a little disappointing, to say the least, if the mighty *Tyrannosaurus* was often defeated by a brainless leaf-muncher. If we limit the disparity between the two types of dice to one hit, there are only four possible combinations. These are shown in Exhibit 2. It can be clearly seen that the 3 and 2 combination provides the closest outcome for a 3-Red and 4-Green combat, with the edge to red. If the hits per die are increased then green starts to win more than red. Why? Because the dice are also the store of hit points and as combat effectiveness converges the advantage lies with the player with the greater number of hit points, ie 4-Green.

Exhibit 2. The Effect of Different Dice Differentials



Number of hits per dice type (Red and Green)

If the red die has greater than a one hit edge over the green then the red becomes far too strong, winning an overwhelming number of combats. Given this data and the design objectives, it is obvious that the optimal dice arrangement is a red die with a hit on three faces and a green die with a hit on two. Using these two types of dice, Jurassic Wars has seven different dice ratings: carnivores have a dice rating of 1-Red to 3-Red, while the herbivores have ratings of 1-Green to 4-Green.

It's the probability, stupid

Understanding the game mechanism means appreciating the differential effectiveness between the two types of die. The probability the red die will make a hit is 1/2. We will write this as Pr (Red Hit) = 0.5. It

should be obvious that Pr (Red No-Hit) = 0.5. A green die, on the other hand, has an asymmetric probability distribution: Pr (Green Hit) = 0.33 and Pr (Green No-Hit) = 0.67.

Exhibit 3. Possible outcomes of 1-Red versus 1-Green

	Pr (Green No-Hit) = 0.67	Pr (Green Hit) = 0.33
Pr (Red No-Hit) = 0.5	Draw – dice re-throw	Green scores a hit
Pr (Red Hit) = 0.5	Red scores a hit	Draw – dice re-throw

What is the basic probability that a 1-Red beats a 1-Green? We can calculate this in two ways. First we can calculate it theoretically. Exhibit 3 above shows all four

outcomes of a throw each between a red die and a green die.

We can see that there are three outcomes: red scores a hit, green scores a hit and a draw. We can ignore draws because in the event of a draw both dice are re-thrown until a difference is obtained. From the table we calculate that $\Pr(\text{Green scores a hit}) = 0.5 \times 0.33 / 0.5 = 0.33$. A similar calculation confirms that $\Pr(\text{Red scores a hit}) = 0.67$. As we are dealing with only one die for each combatant it follows that whoever scores the hit wins the combat. Therefore, we have theoretically arrived at the following two basic probabilities: $\Pr(1\text{-Red beats } 1\text{-Green}) = 0.67$ and $\Pr(1\text{-Green beats } 1\text{-Red}) = 0.33$.

Checking the probabilities by computer simulation revealed that 1-Red beats 1-Green on 6,670 times out of 10,000 combats. The full probability distribution is included in Basic And Combat Probabilities, a document freely available on our website--see Exhibit 4. This equates to a probability of 0.667--and hence the computer model is extremely accurate. The advantage of using the computer model is that some of the theoretical calculations with larger numbers of dice become fiendishly involved and complex.

The computer model revealed some surprising results. What is the probability that 2-Red beats 1-Red? A little reflection probably suggests that it would be 0.67 or something close to it. In fact, the computer model showed that 2-Red won on 9,005 times out of 10,000 or a probability of 0.9. This can be verified theoretically (see *Basic And Combat Probabilities* for the calculation).

Clearly, a general understanding of these probabilities provides a player with a tactical edge during a game. Such an edge is vital if you are playing some of the game versions such as Jurassic Wars Poker or Jurassic Wars Casino, a Craps-like gambling game.

Trumps and tactics

Another design point was that combats should not be unnecessarily protracted. This would arise if there were

a high number of draws during a combat. To avoid this possibility, each dinosaur is ranked from 1 high to 20 low. If there are three consecutive draws then the lower-ranked dinosaur is deemed to have scored one hit less and loses a die. In this way rank is not only a rough guide to combat effectiveness, it also influences it. This is reflected in the specific combat probabilities.

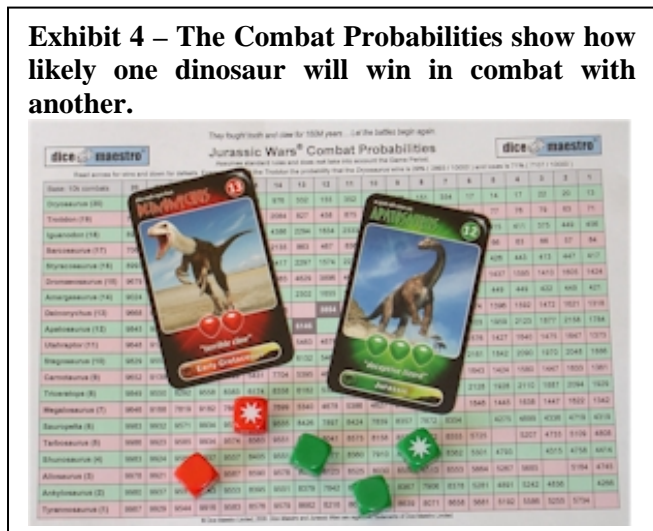
There were two other design points to be included in the standard game rules. One was the introduction of the Game Period, which acts like trumps in a card game. The Game Period is determined by randomly selecting one of the three Timeline cards: Jurassic, Early Cretaceous or Late Cretaceous. Any dinosaur matching the Game Period increases its dice rating by one. Not only does this add variety to the standard game but by varying the Game Period mechanism increased tactical opportunities can be introduced into different versions of the game--more about this later.

The other--and more tactical--design point was the introduction of Combat cards. In the standard game there are three types (expansion packs will introduce more). These are Surprise Attack, First Blood and Extreme Aggression. Each player is entitled to play a Combat card at the beginning of combat, but they are a scarce resource and should be played carefully. Surprise Attack reduces by one the dice rating of the opposing dinosaur. This has a significant effect. For example, if a *Troödon* (1-Red) makes a surprise attack against *Utahraptor* (2-Red) then the probability of a *Troödon* victory increases from 10% to 50%. First Blood is also an effective card. It increases by one the hits rolled on the first throw, which can profoundly affect the outcome of combat. In the above example, it increases the probability of a *Troödon* victory from 10% to 33%. Extreme Aggression entitles a player to re-throw any dice that are not showing a hit--for one throw only. Its probabilistic effects are hard to calculate because the effect of a re-throw is unpredictable but the card is probably best used with carnivores as they are more likely to obtain a hit on a re-roll.

Card mechanics

In Jurassic Wars all combats occur between two players but it was essential that the game could be played by more than two players. So how does the game play work with multiple players? We decided to opt for a 'sequential pairs' mechanism. Let's take a three-player game as an example. Player A is the Lead for the first combat and plays a Dinocard from his hand. Player B, the player to his left, is the Opponent and plays a Dinocard from his hand. Obviously, the opponent has the advantage of seeing the dinosaur he is facing. Some of this advantage is removed, however, because the opponent must declare first whether he is playing a Combat card or not, thus allowing the Lead to decide second. Combat occurs using the speciality dice and will result in one dinosaur being defeated, its Dinocard being eliminated. For the next combat, Player B

Exhibit 4 – The Combat Probabilities show how likely one dinosaur will win in combat with another.



becomes the Lead while Player C is the opponent. The third combat would see Player C as the Lead and Player A as the opponent. And so on.

This game mechanism means that during the early stages a player always engages the same two players, one as Lead the other as Opponent. However, game play is also eliminative so when players have no dinosaurs left they retire from the game, thus forcing a change in the player interaction. And of course eventually only one player will be left in the game and is the winner.

Whistful thinking

Another advantage of a simple game mechanism is that it allows different versions of the game to be created. These are larger, more significant changes than those provided by rule variations. A favourite is Jurassic Wars Whist. This is a point-scoring game in which no one is eliminated. It is similar to the card game Contract

Whist in that players aim to make the exact number of victories from their initial hand as they have bid.

Playing dice

This article has tried to show that a simple game mechanism is not necessarily one that is simple to create nor is it one without tactical interest for gamers. Central to our philosophy, above all else, is that a game should be enjoyable for many--and since the dawn of civilization the simple die in some form has been part of our leisure time.

Classical gamers will still shake their heads and may paraphrase Einstein: 'God doesn't play dice, nor should we' but quantum gamers will be confident that the fundamentals of the universe do not support such a supposition. 'It's the probability, stupid,' they declare as they roll the dice. And then there are a few gasps as the mighty *Tyrannosaurus* suffers a hit from an angry-looking *Iguanodon*...

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Uniquely, Independently, Yours?

STUART CONNOR plays some of the independent computer games available ...

FOR THIS article I was hoping to be able to explore some of the unique games that you can find within the independent scene. At the same time I wanted to stick relatively closely to the strategy genre that I (and I hope our readers) find most interesting. I can imagine a lot of you sighing about the likelihood of me going on about the merits of being an independent, the sheer joy of developers being free and the liberation of choosing not just the road less travelled but of hacking straight into the surrounding jungle in order to do their own thing. Fortunately the article hasn't quite turned out like that.

In the process of choosing games to review I thought about some extremely distinctive ones that I've come across in my past travels. The first game that came to mind was:-

Kingdom of Loathing (Browser)

(<http://www.kingdomofloathing.com>)

Kingdom of Loathing (KoL) is an ever so crazy, slightly subversive, lo-fi, browser based RPG. Sounds great, but ultimately I had to reject it. Much as I enjoyed my time investigating the title, I never felt I could get a real handle on the game. I just couldn't pin down what made the game compelling, both for myself and for the large community that sits alongside the game.

Rather implausibly, it's got its own internet radio channel and that's only the beginning of the strange nature of this game. Firstly, meat is the currency in the game (who needs boring old gold!). You can also indulge in drink (some part of the game involves mixing cocktails but I never got that far) and drug taking too, mostly in order to extend your adventuring day, though there are (in game) side effects. This is because the game limits you to 40 adventures a day, with adventures being roughly equivalent to turns. This neat mechanism is presumably to limit bandwidth issues but maybe it's also there to allay potential player burnout.

The graphics (if the small scribbled pictures could be called that) made me think of Tom Wham but perhaps an alternative universe Tom Wham with a modicum of talent, a hint of psychosis and thankfully a good dose of humour to balance it all out. Humorous descriptions accompany these pictures and are full of pop culture references that mostly seemed to go over my head. I did very much like the humour though, particularly the word play. Seen for example in locations such as *Degrassi Knoll*, *The Palindrome* and *The Misspelled Cemetery*. This sort of humour is

plastered on double thick and while not exactly laugh a minute, it's certainly smirk a minute stuff. You just can't help but be impressed by the sheer volume of material.

With all this strangeness going on and not being able to progress deeply into the game, I felt that any attempt at a structured review would be doomed as an enterprise. The *Wikipedia* entry does a better job of concisely conveying the outlandish variety of the game than I ever could here. It's certainly not an everyman game, but maybe it's a perfect fit for you. Unless you must have your monster graphics card permanently close to meltdown or are just irredeemably miserable, don't let this title pass you by without a little foray into the Kingdom of Loathing.

So with that one crossed of the list I then thought about:-

Dwarf Fortress (Windows, Mac OS & Linux)

(<http://www.bay12games.com/dwarves/>)

This title is an obtuse, rogue-like, underground, empire building game which, like KoL, defies easy explanation. It too eschews the modern convention of being easy on the eye by being firmly welded to the ancient art of *ASCII* graphics (though some recent videos/screenshots of a graphics visualisation mod could melt a man's heart). Unlike KoL it takes this anachronistic feel a step further by having a useless user interface, too. Why? Well apparently it's not on the developer's priority list. I think we'll let him off as there is just the one of him after all.

Dozens of people have already written this and hundreds have probably silently pondered it, but the best way to describe the game on a basic level is that it's equivalent to a Sim-Moria. However this is more than simply a fantasy dungeon simulation game and the list of features is truly enormous.

On the macro scale there is a whole living world outside with other civilizations, a living ecosystem, and weather patterns. All these are based within realistic, randomly generated landscapes including climates, seasons and flowing water for example

On a micro level the detail that can go into the building of a fortress and its population of dwarves is incredible. For example there are around fifteen different types of ore which can be mined and smelted down to pure metals. Then, from these pure metals various alloys can be created which are in turn inputs into other processes. Farming, building and economics

have similarly massive, almost realistic, mechanisms as do a whole host of other sub-systems. It's exhausting and dizzying just thinking about it

Once again there is a whole community attached. It is a committed and learned community which is very vocal by the looks of it. The forums have thousands of threads with literally hundreds of thousands of posts (800,000+ when I looked). Like KoL it also sports a comprehensive user driven wiki with more than enough detail to supplement the basic documentation.

Monstrous in scale, beguiling in its minutiae, in many ways it's everything I ever wanted a game to be. There is just one small problem. Why was it not around 20 years ago? Where was it when I had oodles of free time and I might happily say to myself, 'Yes, tomorrow I'll do some revision but first I've got several hours of prime sleep time to splurge on gaming.'?

I certainly haven't got the time to play it enough to ratchet up the learning curve. I don't even think I've got the time to fully appreciate just what I'm missing out on. So I think that rules out actually reviewing this game. This one will have to wait for retirement, I'm afraid. I'm just praying that when the time comes I can still tell the difference between the myriad *ascii* graphics that create the impressively scaled game maps.

For the second time I have been defeated by a game from a genre that I once considered my bread and butter. Maybe it *is* the graphics that have stopped me from learning and thus enjoying the game. Maybe I am as shallow as the mainstream, secretly believing that first impressions are crucial and that glamour is good on my gaming screen.

So having failed at trying to review two behemoth games, let's take a look at what, on the surface at least, appears to be a slight, light, girly game:-

Dangerous High School Girls in Trouble (Windows & Mac OS)

(<http://www.mousechief.com/dhsg/index.html>)

Immediately, the long, and, it has to be said, unpromising title makes it stand out. To a curious man like myself the title prompts the little red rag twirling in my subconscious – 'Can they really make a game out of this subject?'

After a solid investigation, I think I can safely say they've only gone and done it! It's not exactly one game, instead it's a handful of mini-games stitching together a narrative as the titular girls investigate a mystery in the town of Brigiton. Alerted by some strange goings on at the school your girls are drawn into a web of intrigue, originally focusing on the new maintenance man and a series of unfortunate accidents.

However, the plot soon leads off in other, slightly darker, directions.

You are cast in the role of queen to a gang of high school girls. The queen is the only character you explicitly get to choose as the other gang members must

be recruited within the framework of the game, ie by defeating them in one of the mini-game encounters.

Of these mini-games the *Taunting* game seems most original. This sees you selecting from a list of insults which become increasingly powerful and mature as the girls become savvier. If your opponent has the right comeback for the taunt then you lose some popularity and vice versa if your opponent doesn't know the correct response. The first person to lose all her popularity loses the encounter. The clever thing is that sometimes you need to expose yourself to a potential loss in order to find out comebacks to new taunts that appear. In this case the encounter with the school kids is useful. They are tough to beat but it's a good early place to learn the basic taunts if you are missing any.

The other games are more straightforward. *Expose* sees you decoding a sentence where you are allowed limited reveals of the individual words. *Fib* is a poker like game and *Gambit*, introduced part way into the game, is a slightly spiced up version of Rock-Paper-Scissors. Each game relates to one of the four traits that define the members of your the gang (Popularity, Rebellion, Glamour and Savvy)

Flirting is a slightly different game in that it is not associated with a particular trait and it has no plot connotations. However the reward for success (acquiring a boyfriend) can be very advantageous. They tended to remind me of the followers in *Talisman*; they add bonuses to your stats and sacrifice themselves at the first opportunity for their lovers. Just like the eager loving little puppy dogs that they are!

From this series of mini-games a story unfolds, gleaned from the secrets that you prise from the town's inhabitants. Not all games advance the story, instead some give items and temporary power ups. Your gang member's stats can be increased after a girl has won a certain number of these encounters. Losses on the other hand lead to your girl being temporarily dispatched from the gang. Lose all your girls and your queen will have no protection, so another defeat would lead to the end of the game. Luckily the girls return to your gang a short period after their defeat, though there are some exceptions such as being expelled from school in an early episode. So it's not fatal to lose members of the gang but it does reduce the number of options for dealing with an encounter. Often each girl will allow a different response to an encounter permitting you to choose the right girl for the job. Irritatingly these choices are not always aligned with the particular girls' strengths.

I loved the soundtrack and this adds a great deal of period feeling to the game. I really do wonder how successful this title would have been without this aural scene setting. The period in question (1920s small town America) is not an era I am naturally drawn to but the music and language had me there in a flash. I can't vouch for the authenticity of the conversations in the

game, but the peculiar argot gave me a lot of pleasant time for puzzled musings. For example, what is a pooka? (a goblin, initially friendly but becoming less benign over time). Or maybe a stoolie? (slang for a stool pigeon – a decoy). This pleasure might just be a corollary of my word game delights, as discussed last time out, but it multiplied the fun for me.

All this is played out against a fine background. Graphics are in the style of a faded, well used boardgame with the encounters represented by, what appear to be, metal playing pieces of the type you might find in an old Monopoly set. A host of minor points irritate but don't spoil the enjoyment of the game. Probably the worst is the very sparse documentation. It really is lacking. Enough information is provided to cover the basics of the game but there is little depth and some questions arise which you can only solve on a trial and error basis. Also, the games in themselves do start to become stale a bit quickly. However they always serve to pull you deeper into the plot, especially the *Expose* game where you are directly learning secrets and motivations. Other than that, I found the use of the basic card suits to represent traits most confusing. I could never remember which represented what and ended up writing it all down. As it is only thematic for the one of the encounter games, I think something a little more intuitive and/or original would have been good here. Finally, on the list of bad points, is the lack of mini map support. It's not that the environments are so big that it's hard to get around, but the scrolling back and forth does get monotonous. Also, with much of the screen taken up with the gang it's harder to appreciate what are very well styled backgrounds.

All in all a tight little game of dark, small town sleuthing that is reasonable value for its price. Not girly at all! Oh yes and it's written using *PyGame* (a game development framework). As a recent convert to the joys of the *Python* programming language I was quietly pleased to see this highlighted on the credits page.

This is a game I first played after downloading a demo from the *Manifesto* games site. That site is now defunct, but the final frozen chart will always point to this game as being their best seller. It's sad to see that *Manifesto*, which helped introduce me to independent games, has faded away but I notice that Greg has recently had a boardgame design released (**Mega Corps**, published by *Z-Man Games*), so good luck to him with that one. He is also still maintaining the blog at *playthisthing.com* which is usually worth a read. It covers a broad spectrum of games, many independent, and includes a Tabletop Tuesday section on the topic of boardgames.

Unable to purchase via *Manifesto* I eventually bought the game from *Steam*, another platform for online delivery of game content (as well as digital rights management). It is very slick compared to the *Manifesto* site. So if it's not going to be *Manifesto* that sparks the independent revolution then maybe it will be

Steam. It mostly sells major titles, but alongside these, there is an increasing range of independent stuff too. One can only hope that people pop one in their basket when they are buying the latest blockbuster game.

My experience of *Steam* has been all good, albeit in a limited time. All the transactions have been smooth and the user interface is intuitive if a little bland. I just have that background feeling of disquiet that comes from letting a third party be the arbiter of what you might suppose are your possessions. Especially with memories of Amazon's recent *Kindle* debacle fresh in my mind. For those who missed this news, Amazon remotely deleted copies of the George Orwell novels *1984* and *Animal Farm* from users *Kindle* readers due to a rights issue.

So with some help from *Steam*, the future for independent games still looks bright. There is no chance of it abusing a monopoly position just yet as there are still competing products but if it ever does get to that position let's hope it goes down the benevolent dictator route.

Hopefully the future will always hold a place for the likes of *KoL* and *Dwarf Fortress* too. After all there is no need for *Steam* (or *Manifesto*) in these cases. All that is needed are committed and inventive developers matched to generous users, as remarkably, both these games are currently available for free.

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FLAGSHIP interviews JON OGDEN

Jon moderated the award-winning, turn-based space opera RIMWORLDS for some years and is now planning to return with a digital version of his game ...

1. I know that you've been around for a long time, so how long have you been (a) playing games and (b) designing them?

I grew up in a game-playing family. I still have fond memories of sitting around the kitchen table and playing cutthroat **Monopoly** with my parents and sister. I also remember the time my mother picked up the **Risk** game board and hit me over the head with it, without as much fondness.

I started playing computer games on the *Apple IIe* and the TI-994A. My first experience with PBM games was joining **Universe III** run by *Central Texas Computing* and programmed in *Apple Basic*.

I got my start when I designed a couple of relatively simple text-based solo games mostly for my own amusement. They were versions of the classic *Star Trek* games: "You enter sector 21A. You see a Romulan Light Cruiser, What will you do?" I remember never being able to beat one of the games I designed. That was when I knew I had great promise as a designer.

Rimworlds™ started off as a solo game. Then I realised that I wanted something that had some of the feel of **Traveler®**. That meant PBM back in the days when a 1200 baud modem was *fast*. Like all beginning programmers, I started to code first and design later. Naturally after a couple of months, I had a mess on my hands. So I sat down and started designing the game – by writing the rule books which is not the most efficient way of doing it, but which worked.

2. What made you decide to close Rimworlds and what has made you decide to re-start it?

Money. In the years right before Y2K, there was no way in hell moderating a PBM game could compete with the income you could generate as a consultant/contractor for businesses slithering away from COBOL as fast as their desktop PCs could take them.

But the Rim had been a magic place for almost ten years. From the day when we beat out **Illuminati PBM** to win the first 'Best New PBM' at GAMA right through till the time I felt I owed it to my kids' college fund to jump onto the great dot-com bubble, it had been a great ride for me and for the players – many of whom had played all ten years. We even held five conventions in different parts of the U.S. and had players flying in from Britain and Germany to attend. As soon as I closed it down; I began to miss **Rimworlds™**. Over the years, I have heard from a lot of ex-players about how much they missed it, as well.

As I became a better programmer and the tools at my disposal became more sophisticated and powerful, I would occasionally day-dream about how I could use this technique or that method to create a new Rim. Once I decided to leave the north eastern U.S. and the world of business programming (by this time I was a member of Microsoft New England's NET Architects' Council) and retire to a warmer and sunnier clime, redesigning **Rimworlds™** was an obvious step. And, it keeps me off the streets at night.

3. Will there be many changes in the new game?

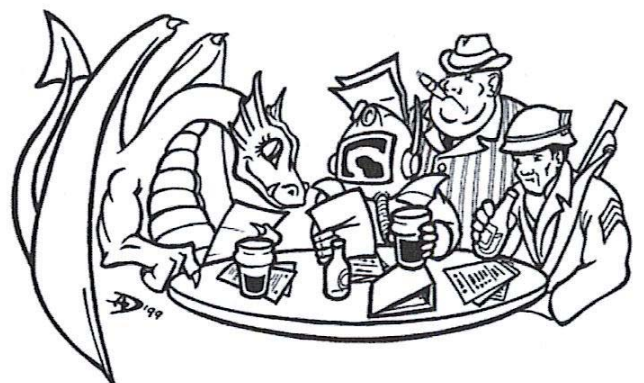
It'll be very different in many ways, while – I hope – capturing and enhancing the feel of Classic **Rimworlds™**. Players will have much more control over the design of their ships and the members of their crew, while each planet (there are about 35,000 of them) will be much more detailed than before. The back story is that this version takes places thousands of years in the future of the original, which should explain any break in continuity.

4. Whereabouts are you based?

I live in South Carolina – but the team that is working with me is based in Oklahoma, Indiana, New Jersey, Berlin, and London.

5. Do you think that players have similar tastes world-wide?

I know that the original **Rimworlds™** appealed to folks in on every continent except Antarctica (but I might have been lucky and found the only person in Saudi Arabia who could enjoy the game.) I would guess that there is a 'western' culture that shares enough commonality that a game can appeal across national borders. The Internet doesn't seem to notice little things like oceans, let alone customs barriers.



6. I guess that you're aiming for an international market--has this had any effect on the design of your game?

Well, we're using GMT to determine our dates. I'm certainly trying to keep slang to a minimum. But I suppose I am simply aiming for that commonality I spoke of.

7. Has it affected the game's presentation?

Nope. What I am driving for is ease of use (for everybody) and clarity. I think those features are appealing regardless of your mother tongue.

8. How do you plan to gather new players?

Advertise in *Flagship*, just like the first time around. By the way, do you accept nudity in ads? We want to be a little more aggressive in adverts than the last time. [wink]

9. Do you work mainly on your own or as part of a team?

I'm the chief cook and bottle washer when it comes to programming. Later, we'll be hiring a clean-up programmer and a fulltime graphics person. When it comes to design, I suppose I am primus inter pares, but

the brain trust keeps me on the straight and narrow.

10. Who does your art-work?

Most of our artwork is purchased commercially.

11. Do you have plans for other games?

Ideas about some? Sure. Plans to implement them in the near future? None at all.

12. Do you see game design as a full-time career?

It was for many years. Hopefully it will be again.

13. Has the games market changed very much in your experience?

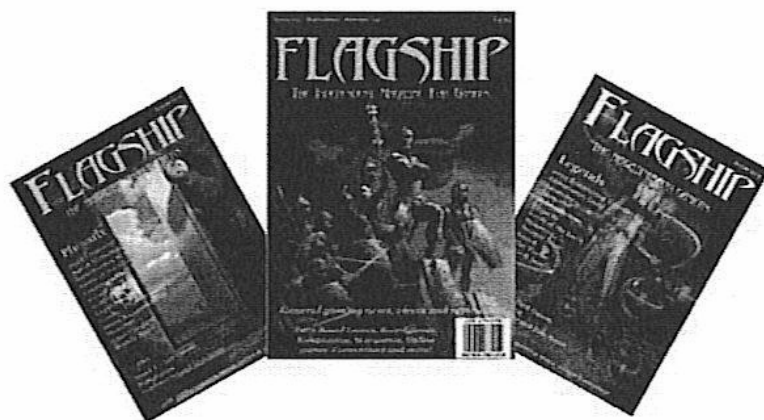
Radically. The Internet has forever changed gaming as much as it has every other method of exchanging information.

14. Do you have any advice for other hopeful game designers?

If anything will deter you – let it. You'll live a happier life, and have a much better chance of getting and staying married.

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www.flagshipmagazine.com

Golden Coast diary, part 1

BILL MOORE shivers timbers in the latest Dungeonworld module ...

ARRR, SHIVER me timbers! Avast me hearties! Pieces of eight! Fifteen men on a dead man's chest! Out, damned black spot (is that right?!). Anyway, that's enough of that 'Talk like a Pirate' malarkey for one day: on with the review...

Golden Coast is the latest module from *Madhouse Interactive* in their long-running **DungeonWorld** PBM/PBeM game. As you will have gathered by now, the theme is Pirates... and Ninjas (which go together like a horse and carriage, so I'm told). It consists of three cities on an isolated and ungoverned coast and is quite geographically separate from previous DW modules, including the main one of the Kingdom of Bereny. Thus you won't be seeing any hyper-powered Berenian characters for a while and your party of up to ten (and any friends they make among the other locals, of course) will more or less have to fend for themselves. Like a lot of new modules it introduces a number of new classes of character available to players, as well as allowing most of the original Berenian ones (Warrior, Enchanter, Priest and so on). Only Crusaders and Glacier Barbarians haven't made it here yet. The new classes are Pirates and Ninjas (obviously), the squid-like Zeld (three different sexes!) and Human SeaFolk and Sea Elves (only two sexes of each, unfortunately. No Trans-Gendered Elves need apply).

I quickly decide upon a small party of four in the remote southern city of Karlistane. Karlistane is the home of a number of scholars, intellectuals and philosophers and is described as a strange and haunted place. We shall see. I'm starting with a male Pirate, DuZeld (the third Zeld sex), a male SeaFolk and a female Midnight Elven Rogue. You get fifteen orders per character per turn which you input in a letter/number/number format.

Turn 1: Meet my characters

Well, my characters turn up at Karlistane as expected. The pirate, Six-Bellies McGraw, starts with a cutlass, flintlock pistol and twenty cartridges and some pirate leathers as well as the usual 50 gold all characters get

on setting up, so seems fairly well equipped in comparison to some others. I decided not to go for a ninja as well, although GM Steve says that is possible, as long as you 'roleplay' that they and pirates hate each other's guts (literally and metaphorically). DuZeld Xjdjgish starts with a feeble 17 health, but apparently Zeld grow more or less indefinitely, so once his size gets past 'small' that may go up. He also generated two psi crystals, which can apparently be used as part of his natural psionic powers, but has no other equipment. By the way, I got that name by the entirely scientific method of shutting my eyes and hitting keyboard keys at random! SeaFolk Mikael DuGuessis starts with no equipment, but is at least naturally a little tougher than Xjdjgish. He also has three starting skills: swimming, sailing and fishing, unlike the others. Time to hit the shops, methinks! My last character, Elven Rogue Castra Pollux, has only the lock picks required to open doors and chests and isn't much tougher than the Zeld. She's also my only character who can't swim, so I hope the nearby traders sell rubber rings!

The local environment is fairly busy at the moment, as you'd expect, with fifty or so other characters standing around not doing an awful lot. As is usual, most people seem to have gone for the 'exotic' new types rather than the plain vanilla DW standbys, but there's still the odd warrior, ranger or rogue dotted around. We appear to be on a north/south coast with the sea to the east. The party has started just outside Karlistane, which is visible just off the beach nearby, as are a number of other locations on the 13 x 13 maps you get. Unfortunately, as all four start at the same place they all see the same map, but that will change as they move around. The locations they can see are Buccaneer Skills (I'm guessing for Pirates), Hidden Way Skills (Ninja), Local Skills (?), Beach Traders (presumably selling stuff) and a Boatyard, which at a wild guess, probably sells boats.

Diplomacy in DW is mostly carried out on Yahoo Groups and there's a wide variety of boards; by this time there's plenty of activity on the one set up specifically for Golden Coast:

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

Only point I would make with regard to this is that you'll have to be careful to avoid spoilers if you like to find out things for yourself, but they're ideal for exchanging information, mapping, collecting allies and co-ordinating attacks with other characters and parties. Anyway I decide to spend my first turn checking out the visible locations and see what we shall find...

Golden Coast at a glance

The latest area of *Madhouse's* **Dungeonworld** setting, this time lying in a coastal region where there are lots of monsters to encounter and, maybe, to vanquish. £20 for 20 turns, however many characters you start:

www.madcentral.com/goldencoast

Turn 2: Preparing for trouble

Well, Xjdfugish heads off south to check out the Local Skills shop. Apparently this offers skills to SeaFolk so, rather annoyingly, I've sent the wrong character to check it out. Ho-hum! He does, however, spot a Duneman Warrior heading northwards along the beach behind a fence. Never met one of these before, but from the picture they look fairly tough; a big bald tattooed bloke with a ball-and-chain! Time to head back north until Xidifugish has some armour, I think. Examination of his psi crystals (now up to four) tells me he has four psychic abilities, but not what they are. More research needed, again. I also set his fear factor and overwatches on the other three of my party. Overwatch is a useful facility whereby you can 'defend' up to five other characters; if a monster attacks them, you will get an attack in on the monster in their defence. It's very good for lightly armoured characters equipped with ranged weapons such as bows, who can avoid *melee* but still support the main fighters. Or if you're travelling in a tight-knit group, for added protection. Fear factor is a setting that allows your character to avoid combat when your health is reduced to that level by monster attacks. A FF of 0, which is what you start at, in effect means your character will fight to the death! It's thus a good idea to change it on the first turn.

Pirate Six-Bellies spends time equipping his leathers and pistol. You have twenty backpack slots where items start in and fifteen named body slots ('head', 'neck', 'body' etc.) which mean you're actually wearing them, so when equipping something it goes from the backpack to the correct body slot for that item. Thus the pirate leathers equip to 'body' and the pistol to 'attack hand'. Armed and armoured! Now every time he issues an attack order or moves *and* a monster is in range of the weapon equipped, he should fire at it. Nothing this turn, though. All is quiet. He does take a look at Buccaneer Skills as well as setting similar fear factor and overwatch orders as Xjdfugish, though. It tells him it's a site where pirates can learn skills (knew that!) and he needs to issue a L 30 order to find out more. Bah! Shiver me timbers indeed! Pirates were never known for their patience...

Rogue Castra heads for Karlistane to take a look inside. A look ('L') order tells her to do 'L' '2' to actually look inside but having an order free she's already done that (some of us are ahead of the game as usual!). Unfortunately it gets a blank response. Now here's the downside of new DW modules – Steve doesn't believe in playtests so, in effect, the first wave of characters to hit a new area *is* the playtest. You're going to spend your time bumping into the odd coding error now and then. There's a bug report facility on the website and they're almost always fixed by next turn, but you will hit some in these areas. If you want metronome-like reliability in your games then I'd suggest you give the newest areas a miss and head for older dungeons such as Central or Mirrormane or

Icehaunt. They've been going so long all the bugs have been worked out.

Meanwhile SeaFolk Mikael hits one of the traders and uses most of his 50 gold to buy some useful starting kit--long sword, wooden shield, woollen cloak, leather boots and leather gloves. Will at least keep him alive until he can get some better armour and items dropped by monsters killed or picked up lying around in dungeons. Checks out the boatyard too, and runs into the 'further look order required' problem Six-bellies had. Also something called the 'House of Blood' has come into view. Sounds lovely!

On the message board there are rumours of players being killed by monsters around the other two cities. Yes, I know that's what is supposed to happen but Steve did specifically state earlier that the monsters around cities would be fairly weak and wouldn't be too much of a threat, so it's a bit of a surprise.

Turn 3: Individual skills

Xjdfugish checks out the Duneman and discovers 'Dunemen are an insular race of savage humans who prey upon the decent folk of the coastal lands.' Well, I'm not sure I would describe a bunch of Pirates and Rogues as 'decent folk' myself but, hey, we appreciate the sentiment! He (she? it?) also finds time to investigate his psychic skills further and discovers he has the powers of Clairvoyance, Psychokinesis, Portokinesis and can fight a Psionic Duel with another Psionic, where 'The two minds meet, raw, unchecked, and smash against one another with their psionic abilities.' Woo-hoo, exciting! Unfortunately this takes a full twenty psi crystals, so it's going to be a while before little old Xjdfugish gets to play psionic killer (I'm really beginning to regret choosing that name now I have to type it out twenty times!).

Pirate Six-Bellies checks out the Buccaneer Skills site and finds it teaches six new skills exclusively to pirates. These range from the slightly obvious ('Cutlass Expert') to the genuinely obscure ('Pieces of Eight'). All have a cost in Experience (xp) and Gold (gp). Unfortunately they start at 200gp/200xp so it will be a while before he can afford those too. You start with 50gp/0xp and accumulate them by killing monsters and looting the corpses, or if you're particularly cowardly, looting the corpses of monsters others have killed. You won't get you any xp that way, though you also accumulate 15xp per turn simply by surviving. Buccaneer Skills also sells useful piratical equipment such as a parrot (not the dead kind, one sincerely hopes!).

Due to an order cock up on my part (yes even we experienced players make them) Castra unfortunately spends the entire turn trying to buy equipment in the wrong spot. The less said about this the better.

Mikael equips his new kit and, feeling slightly tougher, checks out the local boatyard, only to find it... sells boats. Mmmm. Starts with a small one-man canoe

for 300gp and goes up to a sea-going sloop for 4000gp. Looks like my vision of starting a pirate fleet is going to take a bit of work then. A monstrous eel hoves into sight just offshore, so obviously the waters aren't entirely peaceable either.

Turn 4: Duneman danger?

It's Xjdfugish's turn to hit the trader this time. As well as the usual starting items he buys a dagger (in case he runs out of psi crystals) some healing ointments (which restore health lost in fights) and rations. For eating, obviously – everybody has to eat occasionally. 'Occasionally' means about once every five turns in DW parlance. Also another Duneman comes into sight from the west – and this one is *not* behind a fence. Uh-oh!

Six-Bellies manages to do something really clever and equips both his cutlass *and* his pistol at the same time, as the pistol slots into his defence hand. In effect this gives him two attacks, though the cutlass, being a melee weapon, will only work if a monster is close up in the same or an adjacent square. Not sure of the range of the pistol yet, but I imagine it will be further than that.

Castra does what she should have last turn (blush). Mikael takes a quick look inside the city of Karlistane, which is now open to visitors. Sees a lot of similar looking buildings and some streets inside.

Turn 5: Yes, the Duneman is a tough prospect

Using his Psychokinesis power, Xjdfugish creates a mental weapon and equips it to his attack hand. He also overwatches an elf named Moonlight standing next to the Duneman, in the hope that Duneboy will attack her and X will get a free shot at him. Doesn't work as Moonlight flees, but it was worth a try. He equips his shield and other items for added protection.

Six-Bellies, being slightly quicker on the draw, overwatches Moonlight as well and does get one attack in before Moonlight gets out of the Duneman's range. It does thirteen damage, which is quite impressive as the pistol has a damage range of 7 to 14 and this is towards the upper end of the scale. Thirteen damage would probably kill some lesser monsters so this indicates the Duneman is pretty tough. Chatter on the board indicates that other players have hit him as well, so, as feared, we could be in a little trouble. In fact, it seems the beast has claimed its first casualty as the body of female sea elf Aquamarina lies nearby. One puzzle is that although the pistol only fired once, Six-Bellies' backpack now only contains eighteen cartridges, down two from the original twenty, and it ain't a double-barrelled weapon! Looks like another bug report is required. SB then splurges his entire fifty gold on a treasure map at Buccaneer Skills. Greedy and a gambler, eh?

Castra spends a quiet turn equipping items and searching for food. She's not really a front line fighter,

so I don't feel able to throw her into the fray, especially until she has some decent armour.

Looking for food is one of the things you can do when you just want to use up otherwise wasted orders. The other possibility is to train and potentially raise one of your six 'natural' statistics such as dexterity. These can impact on the possibility of success when certain actions are carried out by the character later.

Mikael decides to leave the city for other folk to explore and heads for the Local Skills site his Zeld friend checked out earlier. This offers skills and items specific to SeaFolk, just as Buccaneer Skills did for Pirates. It also offers two possible paths. These are expensive, powerful and highly prized skills which come with only one drawback – each character can only ever have one.

Once chosen, you're stuck with it for good and you may well not know what you're getting beforehand, either! The two on offer here, Voyager and Dunewalker, cost 2000gp/2000xp and twice that respectively. It's a big gamble and definitely a long way off for Mikael!

Next up: The fearless four head inland in search of Pirate Treasure! Or they all get stomped into the dust by an ornery Duneman, in which case this is going to be a very short diary indeed...



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Designing and Selling a New Game: Jenga

CAROL MULHOLLAND reviews a book about the birth and growth of JENGA ...

JENGA IS A game based on the process of building a tower from variously-shaped wooden blocks and *Leslie Scott's* book, *About Jenga*, is described accurately enough on its cover as 'the remarkable business of creating a game that became a household name.' Leslie Scott comes across as a woman with persistence, strength of character and faith in her own creative powers. Not everything has been easily achieved, though.

Born and brought up in Africa to ex-patriot parents, she is now a professional games designer based in England, although she also travels in Africa with her zoologist husband and their two children for part of the year. Her book strikes me as a very useful one for *Flagship* readers who have faith in their own ideas for new games and it should be of interest to games-players generally, because Leslie is happy to try to analyse the reasons for her successes and failures.

Jenga has sometimes been thought of as a version of a traditional game—from Africa or the Orient, maybe?—but Leslie stresses that it is indeed her own creation. Her family would play all sorts of games among themselves and Jenga itself arose from a set of building blocks made by a local carpenter for her younger brother when they were living in Ghana. The blocks weren't in themselves a game, of course: the game evolved later. Meanwhile, Leslie followed her schoolfriends to Oxford, where she wasn't able to become a student herself because she hadn't worked hard enough to qualify. She took various temporary jobs, of which the most significant was with the microprocessor firm *IntelUK*, in its early days, before the importance of computers was fully understood. Leslie was soon promoted to the promotional and PR side of the business; although she was only 22, her youth and her ability combined to convey the progressive aspect of the firm and she worked there for four years before switching to a design company, *Arena*.

As part of running promotional campaigns for *IntelUK*, Leslie devised competitions and games for the people attending. Another useful source of experience and contacts was Oxford's Real Tennis club. Indeed, it was while holding an Elizabethan feast with various games here and seeing how much Jenga could interest players, that Leslie resolved to bring her game to market. She had already modified the dimensions of the blocks and added the rule that the block you have just removed must be placed back on the top of the tower.

Having found a firm to manufacture blocks for the first hundred games, Leslie then had to pick a suitably catchy name. After some thought, Jenga was chosen: it means 'build!' in KiSwahili, and it's both new to

English and has the advantage that it has no unfortunate associations in other languages. Leslie then had to trademark the name, copyright its rules and also take out a patent for the game itself. However, Leslie abandoned the plan to patent Jenga because this would turn out to be hideously expensive, but copyrighting the rules and trademarking the name was some safeguard from plagiarism.

Leslie goes on to describe her efforts to market Jenga and when, in the States, a friend's brother offered to distribute it in Canada, this seemed to answer the problem of selling enough copies to recover costs and make a profit. But beware if you have a game of your own: by being too trusting Leslie lost her worldwide rights in the game and she is still puzzled about how she could have been so unwary as to sign them away without taking legal advice. Of course, you must read the book for details of how all this happened.

She discusses interestingly what qualities can make a game a 'classic' and describes some of the daunting financial problems that arose as she tried to launch Jenga: all useful and relevant information for game designers. She describes how difficult it is for a newcomer to break into the toy and game market.

Other ideas that Leslie has worked on include a word game called **Swipe**, a magazine called *Good Gift*, a boardgame called **The Great Western Railway** and, among others, a fund-raising game for Oxford's Bodleian Library. Now working as Oxford Games Ltd, Leslie's main interest remained Jenga, which needed to be demonstrated to potential players to show them its potential. And yes, it's still doing well!

Sets are available for around £10, which seems a reasonable price nowadays. Leslie's book costs £14.44 at present from *Amazon* and is published by the *Greenleaf Book Press*. I'd recommend the book to anyone thinking of launching a new game. It's been Leslie's enthusiasm for Jenga which has won through, but she doesn't hesitate to describe the problems that have faced her in bringing the game to market.

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Atlantica Online

The MMO with turn-based combat is reviewed by MORG

ATLANTICA ONLINE IS A strategy, turn-based MMO with a lot of really good points that make the game almost, but not quite, worth playing. My one belief in games is that, no matter how hard-core you want your player base to be, no matter how well you treat them in the higher levels, no matter how unique your game... if in the beginning, you don't hook them, it doesn't matter. This game has loads of goods but it's hard to find the fun. There is, however, one area where this game shines, and explains why so many players enjoy it: the combat system.

Combat

Unlike other MMOs, combat is turn-based. You travel along with (mostly invisible) mercenaries who appear when it's time to fight. You control your mercenaries' movements and attacks as well as your own. Mini-chess, in a way - you can't just pound a bunch of keys and try to beat your opponent and any lag you happen to be experiencing that night. You can tell which character is able to move by the green circles underneath them and you can select the specific opponent you want to attack. The format is 3X3 blocks. This combat style is my favourite feature of the game. I truly enjoyed it, as will anyone who likes that level of control in game-play. There's less of a mash feel when you can spend 15 seconds to control all of your mercenaries.

The opponent gets a fair shot at you as well. It also means you change your play style a bit. The only time that this was awkward was when attacking normally mundane creatures that wouldn't have a 'strategic' style of combat. Imagine several little Bambis lining up in formation and attacking tactically--it just looks odd. I can see people playing this game simply for this turn-based style of combat--it's why I will still be logging on: the combat is that cool and that fun. It's also why I didn't get as far as I normally would. I enjoyed studying and learning each of the different mob's strengths and weaknesses so much and I lingered in the starting areas. That'll slow anyone down. If you combat enough of the mobs, you gain knowledge of the mob that goes into your handy dandy notebook. You can use potions and scrolls in combat as well as magic. There's a system to picking and placing your mercenaries as well, and it'd

be a mistake to just randomly pick your mercenaries. Truly, the combat alone is a reason to play this game.

Oh, I must spare a sentence in this review to highlight the Notebook feature! This lets you keep track of NPCs you meet: mercenaries, mobs you've gained information or knowledge about and quests, including the Quest NPC you next have to meet. The handy dandy notebook was easy to use and understand and I found it to be an invaluable tool.

Graphics and Feel

The graphics and settings are well-done. The settings are based on realistic geography--I started in Sappora--and content is updated fairly regularly. The settings themselves were visually pleasing but a little generic. Overall, the feel of the game seemed to discourage wandering--some of the areas seemed small and closed. This was a negative because there is so much walking in a game that although large, seemed small. Since I really was working on mastering how to use the turn-based combat system, it wasn't too bothersome at first--but players who are inherent explorers may feel limited. The key is, if you're an explorer, to try to ignore the boundaries of some of the areas and just keep wandering anyhow. Level limits keep you out of some areas, but as you level and they open, so will your exploration options. While containment is common (and really necessary), usually there's an attempt to give the illusion of wide open spaces. As for character graphics, there's not a lot of customization. I decided this didn't bother me since it is a 'free' game, but a few more customizable options would be nice.

User Interface

The user interface is similar to every user interface in a game that works--it's simple, it's not hard to figure out and it doesn't get in the way of game-play. Occasionally, little texts would pop up announcing events or random tidbits of information I mostly ignored. I will say this, it never got to the point where it was obnoxious, and so I didn't mind it as much. My only complaint here is I am a big jumper in game, and I couldn't stop myself from constantly opening the inventory box by hitting the space bar. Old habits are sometimes hard to break.

Loot/Stuff

The inventory/looting system rewards you randomly, with pieces you can use in crafting and random pieces of armour or weapons usually found in boxes that aren't going to be near as good as the ones you could buy in the item mall, but still fulfil that need to get 'stuff' that I have. This system worked for me and I had no problems with the slot-like method with which your reward was

Atlantica Online at a glance

An online game set in a fantasy world from *NDOORS*.

It's free to sign up:

atlantica.ndoorsgames.com

chosen. It was kind of fun, watching the items roll, but after a while it became part of the background of the game. Also fun were the random gifts I received from other players. It is indicative of a community, even if other players are being nice only to clear out their inventory. One thing to remember is that since crafting later on is a huge component of the game, you'll want to learn crafting skills.

Lvl 20: Rome/Free League

Rome is the place where the bazaars and shops are located, and it isn't controlled by any guilds. You can teleport there at level 20 and explore, but most of the fun is outside of Rome. Towns are usually controlled by guilds, and this is a game where if you want to stay around and have fun, joining a guild is an almost-must. Rome is also where you can access your warehouse. At level 20 you can also join the Free League, which is a risk-free PvP option. You don't lose anything and can battle other players and gain some coin and loot from the opponent's mercenaries, if you win.

Crafting

Every good MMO should have crafting. For some players, crafting is a separate game in a game, and for this reason, an MMO with a poor crafting system will lose out on a large player-base. I'm a mid-level crafter. I get sucked into crafting for a few weeks, then stop, then start, then change my mind completely, start over, etc etc, but an MMO without crafting is not much of an MMO for me. Crafting in Atlantica is essential, since at higher levels all of your gear really should be crafted. You can learn to craft from an NPC or another player. You gain crafting components in a similar fashion to other MMOs, either purchasing or killing mobs, and mobs mainly only drop crafting materials randomly, but remember your Handy Dandy Notebook? You can find out which mob you need by pulling up that mob and their information. This comes in handy when you're trying to figure out what you need to kill to obtain a certain ingredient. Your ability to craft something depends on workload, and you don't need to be in town or a city to craft, you have to have a certain workload instead. There's also an auto-craft action that can be acquired in game.

Quests

The tutorial quests are a positive. Each quest in the early levels teaches you a function of game-play. I like the way the tutorial is incorporated into the overall story, but it doesn't overcome the basic problem of the game which is, even the quests seem half done and uninteresting. This isn't a problem when you are in the first three starting areas, 'dreaming' with the three sisters. But when you get into the game, the quests aren't that compelling. I loved the auto-move function, but found that once I selected Auto-Move, my mind wandered to something else: the television, a snack,

laundry... I'd get up, leave my character moving somewhere in the game, and then forget entirely about coming back to play it. The auto-move encouraged abandonment of the game. Listening to the narration would have been cool if I didn't find the actual dialogue annoying... 'I don't want to talk right now, so why don't you go away' type dialogue just seems to make the game less immersive. Also, the user interface for quest dialogue could have been done better - there has to be a way to get rid of the [brackets] around certain [highlighted] words.

Gambling!

This feature is one of Atlantica's more redeeming qualities, and probably where they hook a large number of players. Arena betting is conducted at specific times of the day, and while I avoided this feature, having a highly addictive personality, I encourage everyone else to become addicted to it. Bet on your gladiators and throw some in-game money down. It's a way to do something different in game, and one of the details in Atlantica that explains why people stick with it. You can pick your favourites, the long-shots, the sure-to-wins, and then during the match, chat with others betting.

Free!

I expected this game to start out exciting, and to hook players early in order to get players to shop the item-mall and engage in the player and GM events and the gambling. After all, if you start out playing a game that you really like straight off, it's easy to justify spending money, gambling and frolicking in the areas that will make NDOORS a profit on this game. I didn't feel that in this game. I kept hoping as I went along that something interesting would pop up, but all I could think as I played was that I could just log in to EQ II. There wasn't any reason for me to stay long enough to want to buy anything. The truth is, the game gets more fun the more you play it and the more side-features and tricks you learn. It's not the questing, the wandering and the end-game that will keep you engaged. It's the style of combat, the equipping of you and your mercenaries, the tactical combat style, the betting, the crafting, the community and a myriad of other 'side' reasons to stay that you won't discover until oh, level 20 or so. The story is okay, the quests aren't interesting and the narration can be... annoying. The one redeeming quality is the turn-based combat. I encourage everyone to try this game out, but don't pass judgment until you've 'found the fun' because it's there; it just takes a while to get to. This is a game I will return to and play, especially if I can avoid getting sucked into spending too much money in it, but as of now, it's not my first-choice game. As I go off and explore more and quest less, I may change my mind. This is a game well-worth sticking around and exploring and, despite some reservations, I intend to do so!

Pevans' Perspective

Reporting on Spiel '09

Plenty of new games at the great German festival ...

IF IT'S OCTOBER, it must be Essen! The *Spiel* games fair is a fixture in the calendar as far as I'm concerned. There are just so many new games to see and the enthusiasm of the visitors is infectious. Even over four days there isn't time to see and play everything, so this report can only give a flavour of the event.

One game I have played, if only once, is Vladimir Suchy's latest for *Czech Games Edition*, **Shipyard** (published in English by *Rio Grande Games*). There's an awful lot going on in the game. Players are building ships from sections of hull, to which they add equipment (such as masts, funnels and guns) and crew. Once complete, they take the ship on a shakedown cruise and score points for it. Various actions are available to players to enable them to collect the ship sections and everything else. Other actions let them acquire and trade goods as another way of getting what they need.

The heart of the game is a track on which players move their pawn to select an action. In this game, though, the actions are tiles that move round the track as well. And the sequence of the players' pawns makes a difference, too. Hence the choices facing the players are different each turn. Each action taken means moving a pawn on the track for that action, which then shows precisely what you get for the action. The timing of when you take an action makes a difference too. As I said, there's an awful lot going on. I suspect this is a game that rewards 'efficient' play—it'll probably take a while to work out just what's efficient. There's more on all their games at czechgames.com.

I mentioned **Sherwood Forest**, one of the new games from *Eggertspiele*, in *Flagship #129*. It's a neat, tactical game of Robin Hood-style banditry in the eponymous woodland. *Eggertspiele* had two more new games for us to see this year. **Havana** is a Reinhard Staube game that looks like it is related to **Cuba**, but that's just the artwork. The theme of this game is constructing buildings in the Cuban capital. Players each have a set of action cards and play two a turn. The numbers on the chosen cards give the order in which players take their actions. These generally involve getting workers, cash or raw materials. You use these to buy buildings cards from the selection available. Building cards provide the victory points needed to win the game. It definitely looks worth trying.

The second game is **Power Struggle (MachtSpiele)** is the German title), where players claw their way to the top of the corporate structure. In fact, players are looking to be the first to get four of six objectives. They do this by deploying their team of managers, recruiting employees and working their way to the top of departments and divisions. The ultimate goal is the

board of directors and the position of chairman. This is a surprisingly intricate game. The game's designers have clearly taken some pains to reproduce the structure and skulduggery of a large corporation. It looks very interesting and I look forward to finding out how it works in practice. There's more on all the *Eggertspiele* at www.eggertspiele.de.

Uwe Rosenberg's new game is published by *H@LL Games*, a new publisher and spin-off from online magazine and retailer *H@LL 9000*. The game's full title is **At the Gates of Loyang**, though it seems to be abbreviated to **Loyang** most of the time. It is another intricate game that centres on planting, harvesting and selling things—think **Bohnanza** on steroids or **Agricola** without all the farm development a. It's set in China, where the players are all small farmers. They plant vegetables in their fields, harvest what they grow and trade (swap) with market stalls.

The main object is to sell your vegetables to customers. Regular customers need to be supplied each turn—and there are penalties for missing a delivery—while occasional customers will wait for the right combination to arrive. These provide the money that's needed to buy victory points—which get increasingly expensive as the game goes on. Each turn players get a couple of new cards, which can include 'helpers' who provide a one-off bonus, discount or something else special. **At the Gates of Loyang** is a clever game that will need a bit of practice to get right. *H@LL Games*'s website is at www.hallgames.de.

New from JKLM at *Spiel*, though it has been around for a few months now, was **Tulipmania 1637**. I am fascinated by this game, as it's different from anything else I know. The game is about the bubble market in tulips in Amsterdam at the end of 1637. Players are traders, buying and selling tulips and driving prices ever higher. They also have a private network of buyers, represented by cards, each of whom is after a particular colour of tulip. These provide a way of pushing prices up without spending money—but without getting a tulip either.

Players make money as prices rise, but sooner or later the bubble bursts. The price of a tulip hits a peak and then collapses as everybody sells. This is where players' private buyers are really useful as they give players priority in selling, allowing them to get the best prices for their tulips. The game ends when the last price crashes and the player with the most money wins. Once you get to grips with the mechanics, you realise the game is far less about these than about the players. Like Poker, the key to the game is reading your opponents. I find this much harder than playing the game, so this is a real challenge.

Prime Games's Chelsea cut it very fine, with the first copies arriving from the printer on Wednesday morning. Anyone who saw me on Wednesday waving a large hairdryer over a table full of games was watching the final stage of the shrink-wrapping process. Chelsea is a family-orientated game from designer John Ede, who has a range of children's games to his credit. However, Chelsea has enough tactical opportunities to interest adult gamers as well.

The colourful board shows a street in Chelsea with brightly-coloured houses and garages, each with parking spaces for cars and a van (just right for taking a stack of games to Essen ... but that may be me). Players are well-off families looking to set up their offspring in their own homes. Being picky, the children will only move into a house that has at least three elements of the same colour—as long as it's not the same colour as them. Then they need a partner, which requires four bits of the same colour, different from both the players' colours. The down side to that is that both players score the points. This and the various restrictions on what players can do make for some real tactical elements to the game. Find out more at www.primegamesuk.com.

I was particularly interested to see the brand new *Ragnar Brothers' game, A Brief History of the World*—their latest development of their terrific *History of the World*. Spiel '09 was its launch. The game remains essentially the same as the original, played over a series of Epochs in world history. In each Epoch, players get to start and expand an 'Empire' in a region of the world. They score points according to the regions they have pieces in—from their current and previous Empires. Part of the game's tactics is in the Empires you play: their positions on the board and in the turn order.

The most obvious change in the new game is that the regions of the board are divided into fewer areas. Following on from this, Empires have fewer pieces, but can still occupy the territory they did historically (Alexander can get to India). This in itself speeds up the game. The simple combat system has been re-jigged, reducing the potential for a single attack to provoke an awful lot of die rolling. The end result is a game that feels and plays much like the original, but can be completed in a much shorter time. Beginners will need longer, though, so I suggest keeping the numbers down when beginners are involved. For more about the game and the *Ragnars*, see their website at www.ragnarbrothers.co.uk.

The Dutch gamers at *Spotter* had a new business game for us. **Greed, Incorporated** is another lengthy, complex game by Jerouen Doumen and Joris Wiersinga. Players start as chief executives, each running a company. This is interesting enough in itself. Players bid for production assets for their company. Once installed, these produce goods the company can sell. However, some of the assets will take basic products and combine them to make more valuable

goods. Add in changes in market value and you already have a business game.

However, the point of *Greed* is to get fired. This brings the player a pay-off from the company, so the more money in there, the better. They can use this to start a new company. Or buy themselves some nice executive toys. A nice yacht, perhaps, or maybe a Learjet. These are the only source of victory points in the game, so that's what you're aiming for. It's clearly a game for our times! The trick to success seems to be cashing in quickly and moving on—players will generally run several companies through the game.

The *Warfrog* team had three new games. **Steam Barons** is an expansion for Martin Wallace's **Steam** with maps for Eastern USA and Northern England. It also introduces a stock market option to the game, allowing players to trade in shares as well as build railways. As *Steam* is published by Mayfair, they are co-producing the expansion. **God's Playground** is *Treefrog's* second three-player game. It is set in Poland over three centuries. The players are noble families combining to fight over external enemies while competing with each other for the upper hand in Poland itself.

The game I've played is **Last Train to Wensleydale**, about short-lived railway companies in the Yorkshire Dales. At first glance, I thought the board showed a partially dissected monkey brain, but the gaudy colour scheme is actually landscape. The livid red lobes are the hills of the Dales themselves. The bilious yellow bits between are the valleys and the lurid green is the surrounding pasture land. The hills provide stone and the pasture *Wensleydale* cheese, both of which need to be taken to the markets. Also looking for transport are the 'passengers' scattered across the board.

Players build short railway lines, connecting to the major companies on the edges of the board, to collect the cheese and stone. However, first they have to bid for the various types of influence that will enable them to acquire rolling stock and counter objections to their construction. Most importantly, though, some influence will allow them to sell off their loss-making railways to the major companies. *Last Train to Wensleydale* is another clever game from Martin Wallace. Interestingly, there is no long strategy in this game—in the long run, these railway companies face ruin. So the game is all about making a fast buck and getting out. Ingenious and game I shall be playing for a while. There's more about the *Warfrog* games at www.warfroggames.com.

As always, *Spiel* was huge fun and it was great to see so many people enjoying the games. The organisers, Friedhelm Merz Verlag, did a great job, as always. Next year's event is scheduled for 21st-24th October 2010 at Essen's Messe and I'll be there. For more information, keep an eye on the website:

www.internationalespieltage.de.

Have You Hugged Your Internet Lately?

MORG wonders how important gaming is to ISPs ...

LAST WEEKEND, I had to deal with one of the greatest frustrations an online gamer can deal with: internet connection problems. I spent half of my raid time disconnecting and reconnecting, which was terribly fun. Then, on Monday, the internet went out entirely, and stayed off for 24 hours. Besides giving me a lot of free time to take care of things I haven't been able to recently, it also gave me time to reflect on how much the internet has become part of my daily life as a gamer.

There's no doubt that many of us, myself included, often take our internet access for granted. At times, it feels like a utility, even though it feeds off them. I couldn't even begin to explain to my provider that I needed the internet up as soon as possible so I could work, and that my work, at least partially, consists of playing games online. There's little respect for online gamers at Internet Service Providers (ISPs), even though many of their employees are part of our growing group. The attitude is that the internet is a luxury, and we should be happy with the speed and service we get. It reminds me of all the times that my dad would tell me to be grateful for the dinner on my plate, and I'd better eat it because there were starving children in Ethiopia.

In an effort to be 'fair to everyone', some companies, like *Comcast*, have already taken to limiting monthly bandwidth, while others like *AT&T* and *Time Warner* are looking into limiting it by tiers. This is often termed 'acceptable use', and the idea proposed behind it is that some customers of the ISP use 'too much' of the available bandwidth, causing the service for other users to be poor. As such, ISPs have decided to step in and make their own rules as to what home users should and can use the internet for, and what they shouldn't. Usually, ISPs pick on customers using peer-to-peer services, streaming high definition media, and those clearly running some sort of massive business behind their lines, limiting or cutting off their service without providing them alternative options.

Online gamers generally pass just beyond the radar, but with the growing popularity of MMOs, the average home internet user's bandwidth is going to go up. There's a very real possibility we're next on the bandwidth black list, and there's little we as gamers can do.

Here's the deal: the internet is not a public utility; access to it is granted via private companies who have the technology to provide it. The infrastructure is, for the most part, not suited to meet customer demand. In order to meet customer demand in terms of numbers, communications companies have to cut quality across the board by placing limits and restrictions - terms of

use - on their service. That way, everyone gets a slice of internet pie, even if it's more of an *amuse-bouche* than a dessert.

Internet customers can raise their voices and complain, but have little power because there are no real laws in place to say that a certain amount has to be provided per month to each customer, or to set a limit on a maximum charge for a certain amount of usage. To have those laws, we need government interference. To have government interference invites other troubles - raised prices, taxes, fees, possible censorship, and so on the list goes depending on your political distrust and leanings.

As gamers, we're caught in a bit of a tricky situation when it comes to putting the words 'government' and 'internet' in the same sentence. On one hand, there's the issue of wanting advocacy with power behind it. Universal broadband would be nice too, so that everyone has the ability to access a fast, reliable connection in an open market. On the other hand, we want as little interference in our gaming lives as possible, that wonderful concept of Net Neutrality where we don't get charged extra or discriminated against for our online activities, whether it's by ISPs or another organization. Unfortunately, it seems a popular opinion that in order for a service to be protected by law, it must also regulate the way in which the people use the service--that is, that we must trade in privacy for protection.

It may not seem like a big deal to online gamers yet. That's why the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) runs targeted campaigns for gamers about these issues. I'll admit that politics are a sticky issue, and one that is happily fled from by most gamers who are misunderstood by bureaucrats. It's that very fact that we're misunderstood, however, that makes the issue of gamer advocacy so important. I don't know about you, but I don't want to wake up one morning to find an extra bill for online gaming or worse, not be able to log in because playing games no longer is considered 'acceptable' by my provider.

I'm not trying to soapbox and tell you to go and join the ECA or you're going to lose your right to game on the Internet, nor am I asking you to go knock on your local elected legislator's office and tell them you'll do something drastic if you don't have a good connection when you go to raid Icecrown Citadel. Just take a moment to think about how your ISP treats you as a customer, and how they feel about your gaming taking up precious bandwidth. You might be surprised at how little your business really means.

The One Ring

JUDE WELLS explores the new Facebook game based on The Lord of the Rings ...

Getting Started – the Tutorial

IN YOUR FIRST game you will be able to choose from Frodo, Aragon, Gimli or Gandalf, and will find yourself being introduced to the game by Bilbo Baggins himself as he takes you through the tutorial. In a very nice touch, Bilbo will introduce you to the basic game through both text and voice acting, and I have to admit to spending a lot more time on a tutorial than I would usually do just for the joy of listening to Bilbo and discovering the vision of Middle-Earth that *Microcosm* have created.

For my first game I decided to take on the role of Aragon, and I listened as Bilbo introduced me to the basic concepts and different screens that I needed learn about to play the game. The only downside to the tutorial – and this comes up in other parts of the game as well – is the balance of music and voice acting. Many of the results of things you do in the game come in text form which are also performed by way of a voiceover, but I found that the volume was set so that the music drowned out the speech despite there being an option that should fade out the music when the speech is playing, and a volume control for the background music would have been useful. A minor quibble, but when you consider the attention to detail in the game, it's a shame that it meant I played a lot of the game with the otherwise great music turned off.

Basic Concepts

Each turn you choose what you want to do from a variety of orders, and you have the ability to equip your character with one weapon and two items. You start with a few of these, then find more as you explore Middle-Earth. They can range from such things as the **One Ring** itself, to weapons and armour specific to the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*, to more esoteric items such as a Palantir. There is a great attention to detail here, and someone has obviously spent a lot of time finding the appropriate names for the people, places and things of Middle-Earth, from places such as the Mathom House in The Shire to Éomer's sword Gúthwinë. I have no doubt some of these have been made up for the game, but they are so in keeping with Tolkien's world that I didn't notice, and they in no way detract from the game.

The One Ring at a glance ...

Set in Tolkein's Middle-Earth and run on *Facebook* by *Microcosm Games*. Free startup, with optional 'mini-payments for experience'.

www.oneringgame.com

You can give your character at least two actions to perform a turn, which include exploring the many places you can visit, from the safe, such as the Prancing Pony in the Shire, to the downright dangerous, such as Isengard. And on your way to these places you can encounter and recruit the many peoples of note in the world, from Elrond to Quickbeam. Finally, you can use powers you may have learned, and have one or more of your companions aid you in combat.

I say that you can give your character at least two orders, because you do have the option to give up to four orders a turn, but you will have to pay gold to use the third and fourth slots. In the same way will need to pay gold to use a second power. Gold can be found in the game (and you start with 200), but you will find that you run out quickly, so either you will need to save up, or you can purchase gold with real world money.

Like all games on Facebook *The One Ring* is free to play, and can be completed without ever having to give any extra orders. But if you want to be able to explore the world more quickly, then for a \$1 you can buy 250 gold (a pity the process seems to be in dollars and not pounds), or you can sign up to one of the special offers in return for gold, such as subscribing to a Lovefilm free trial in order to receive 4238 gold. As well as using gold to issue more orders, it can also be used to get your turns results immediately: usually at the end of a turn you will need to wait eight minutes for the results to be available, but instead of waiting you can spend 5 gold to get the results straight away. As I said, it is possible to win the game without spending any gold, but it will help a lot, especially on the higher difficulty levels where you may need to issue more orders each turn.

Overall Feel

Production values are something worth talking, about as it is evident that *The One Ring* has them is spade-fuls. First and foremost I enjoyed seeing something not based on the Peter Jackson vision of *The Lord of the Rings* but in fact on the books of Professor Tolkien himself. For although I love Peter Jackson's films, it was refreshing to see a new interpretation that any fan of the books would recognise. While some of the art seemed of better quality than others, it's easy to spend time just looking at the images. That coupled with the voice acting and background music (when I didn't have to turn it off) creates the general mood of the game, which drags you, in and it's easy to spend half an hour or an hour playing the game before realising where the time has gone. This is something that is very unusual for a Facebook game, as most are set up to encourage

players to drop in for short periods, and it's unusual to find one where so much time and effort has gone into the feel.

At the start of each new turn the game presents the outcome of your last actions on a results page, and most of these are described, in detail, in what many would be forgiven for believing was text taken from *The Lord of the Rings* itself. Again, to my joy many of these are also voice-acted, in the same way that Bilbo takes you through the tutorial. I truly loved being able to listen to the encounters while looking at my other results and choosing my actions for the coming turn. If you are in a rush, or don't have the patience to read or listen to the text then you can shorten the descriptions, or even ignore them if you wish. But I would really suggest that you take the time to look over them, as along with the graphics and music they really make the game stand out as a truly immersing experience.

Winning

All the game takes place of course in the world of Middle-Earth, a world in this case depicted on a simple grid-based map. The layout of the map is both easy to navigate and very attractive. From the map screen you can see where you can travel to next turn, and what possible dangers or potential encounters may await you there.

By the end of the tutorial (and the third turn) I found I had travelled from the Shire to Rivendell, learnt the basics of equipping my character and giving orders, and was now ready to choose my Victory Path.

Each of the four characters has multiple ways in which to win the game. As Aragon I chose the Way of the Ringbearer, and elected to take the ring to Mordor and destroy it myself. This meant travelling back to The Shire to recover the One Ring and recruit Sam, then making my way to Mordor, via Lórien where I was to seek out Galadriel and gain the Light of Eärendil, which would help me on my journey. I could also have chosen to aid the people of Middle-Earth and sought to win by gaining sufficient Victory Points (these are gained when you complete a quest or encounter), or I could have aimed to win by recruiting specific characters.

The game itself lasts for approximately thirty turns, in which time you must win before the forces of Mordor claim victory. This seems to be extended by the difficulty level you are playing at and how well you do in combat. You are also rewarded for winning in combat with Minor, Major and Mythical Marks of the Free People, and these are spent to recruit the people you meet in Middle-Earth, from Merry and Pippin to Gandalf and Elrond. Now the game isn't just a retelling of *The Lord of the Rings*, and you can try to act out your version of the book. For example, if you wanted to see what would happen if Elrond and Galadriel escorted the ring to Mordor then you can recruit them and attempt to battle your way into Mordor. What would have happened if the ring-bearer went south via

Isengard? Well that's your decision to make as well. This game is a world of 'what ifs', ready for you to explore and enjoy.

Exploring, Training and Combat

In *The One Ring* you will find yourself exploring the world in order to complete quests and take part in encounters. These may be interlinked, so for example, while in the Vale of Anduin I found some Honey whilst exploring the Gardens of Rhosgobel, and was asked to seek out Grimbeorn the Bear-Shaper and give this gift to him. In return I became a Friend of the Beornings, a good thing to be. This series of events took me through a couple of regions, and is a good example of many of the quests where you will have to bring an item or information to a character in return for a reward. You will gain gold, experience, items and powers by doing these quests, all of which help to improve your character to make them ready for the more dangerous quests that you will have to face later in the game.

You can also train your character and gain new skills as you travel. Most of these will aid you in combat, increasing your damage, how quickly and often you attack, and how many wounds you can receive, and as such should not be overlooked. Combat occurs as you attempt to move to a new region, and is a bit of a let-down, as it doesn't feel you have much in the way of control of what happens, and you can't seem to predict the results with any accuracy other than through trial and error. The computer pits you and any of your companions you have with you against any Dark Servants in the region you are travelling to. You will also have the support of any Free People not travelling

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with you who are in that location. The weapons and equipment you have picked will affect the outcome as well, but there is no input in combat, and it can become very frustrating when you have to try and enter the same region three or four times because you have been defeated in combat (you can only enter a region if you are successful in combat).

Difficulty and Replayability

As you move toward Mordor things become much harder, so by that time you will need to have recruited many companions and trained, but always balancing the time you have left to win the game. The game itself is simple to learn but would take a number of games to master. However, once you have done so, I do worry that there will be limited replay value. When you know where the encounters and quests are you will be able to almost choose your path before you begin the game. Quests, encounters and characters are always found in the same places, and perhaps a bit of more of a random element to this would require you to explore in later games. Saying that, the people at *Microcosm Games* already have plans to add five themed expansion packs

each with new playable characters, companions, adventures, items, enemies and victory paths.

In Conclusion

The One Ring has a depth and production values that set it apart from the run-of-the-mill games you would usually find on Facebook. Here we have a real game with a beginning, middle and end, that will reward players for exploring the world of Middle-Earth, and has a real understanding and self-evident love of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. The real danger for anyone who loves the books is that once you visit you may not want to leave.

Find the Game

Play the game here:

<http://apps.facebook.com/theonering>

Learn more about the game at:

<http://www.oneringgame.com>

Or visit the official *One Ring Game* forum at:

<http://forum.oneringgame.com>



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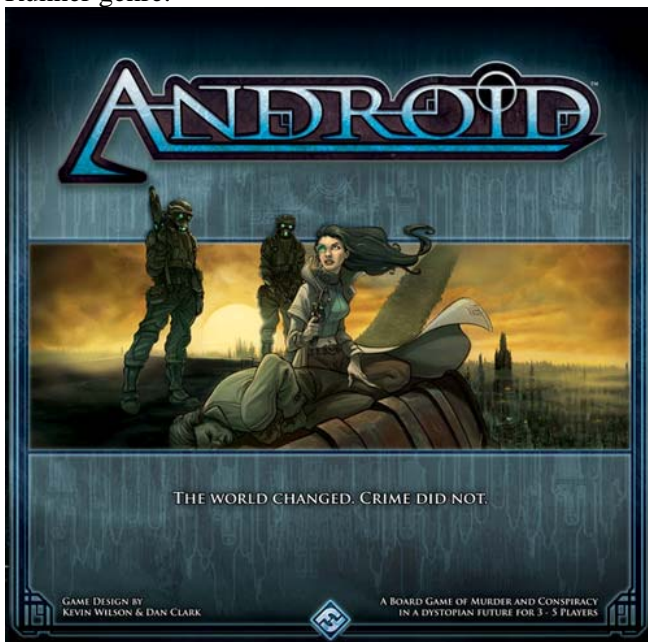
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Android: A future with murder and conspiracy

PAUL GOLDSTONE plays a game with many facets ...

I WILL START with the box and contents – and if you love counters and cards, then this game is for you. There are hundreds of counters, and hundreds of cards, so be prepared to spend a fair amount of time pressing out the bits.

The box artwork is wonderful, as is the artwork throughout the game. For those *Blade-runner* fans it's a must as it really does capture the essence of the Blade Runner genre.



My first qualm regarding the cards and pieces is that unlike other companies *FFG* do not, as a rule, provide decent counter trays, so I advise you get many zip-lock bags to sort the counters out. This will save you about 30 minutes just setting up.

The rulebook is a tome for a board game (30+pages), and is beautifully presented like the rest of the game. I advise reading the rules at least twice before you play, playing once, besides reading them as you play, as there are plenty of unusual concepts which I will explain below.

Android at a glance ...

A sci-fi board game of murder and conspiracy in a dystopian future. Players move around the board of New Angeles and the moon colony Heinlen to uncover the truth.

From *Fantasy Flight Games*, at £37.99.

The object of the game

There has been a murder and, unlike any other murder mystery, your objective is to effectively fit up the person you suspect is guilty, whilst proving another suspect's innocence. This theme is represented by two cards – one indicating which suspect you believe to be guilty, and which suspect you believe to be innocent. Yes, it is possible to have a guilty and innocent card of the same suspect – but then you are just obsessed!

The murder is tied to a conspiracy, so you also need to work out which organisation(s) is behind the murder. As if that were not enough, each character has his or her own personal issues to resolve.

The winner is the person who collects the most victory points at the end of the game and may not actually be the person who identifies the guilty party.

Playing the game

There are so many concepts to get across that it is difficult to be in-depth, but I will try to give a decent overview.

The game is played over two six-day weeks, and there is plenty going on each day.

At the start of the game you place down three types of 'leads' – document, testimony and physical. These are placed depending on which characters are involved in the game and which particular murder scenario you are playing. You travel around the board collecting 'favours', 'baggage', chasing up leads and uncovering the truth behind the conspiracy.

As the days move on, there are event cards that also throw a little more into the mix, along with three scenario-specific events that happen.

Characters

There are five characters to play: an android

who wants to be more human, a clone who wants to be

accepted, a corrupt cop looking to go straight, a bounty-hunter trying to get that big payout and a detective straight out of a gumshoe novel.



Sub Plots

Every character has two or three subplots, of which one is drawn randomly and played through over the week, aiming to achieve 'good baggage' for these plots to advance themselves in a favourable manner. As the day marker advances, at certain 'End Day' points, the marker needs to be resolved based on whether characters have 'good/bad baggage'. These subplots are wonderfully scripted, and you really get a feel for your character as you progress through them.

At the end of the first week the plot will be resolved and the players draw one of their remaining two subplots for the second week to follow through. One character--Raymond Flint--is different in his plots, only playing one plot for the whole game.

Twilight cards

Each character also has two sets of 'Twilight Cards', a Light set and a Dark set. The characters draw from their own Light cards and play them to benefit themselves, and draw Dark cards from other players' decks and play them to scupper them.

The Light and Dark cards are linked to sub-plot cards, and using a card while you or your opponent is on that sub-plot reduces the cost of the card.

And here is the tricky, nifty bit. All characters have two aspects: a positive aspect (Light) and a negative aspect (Dark), indicated by the Twilight Track.

When players are at the far ends of the track, they are said to be 'Light/Dark Shifted'. To play a card, you must spend a Twilight point cost as indicated on the card. To play beneficial cards on yourself, you must pay



Light points--'shifting' yourself towards the dark---and to play cards on other players you pay Dark points--'shifting' yourself towards the light. This is a balancing act, as you must decide on what cards you want to benefit yourself, while keeping an eye on which character you want to use Dark cards to scupper.

Taking your turn

Each player has a certain number of time points per turn (usually six) to spend on actions from drawing cards, moving, encountering squares and following-up leads to

either incriminating the culprit or discovering who the conspirators are.

Movement is handled in an unusual fashion, with hover car rulers. Each character has their own car ruler, and they place this from the location they are in and can go to any other point the ruler touches. This costs one time point. As mentioned earlier, the board is split between New Angeles and the moon colony, Heinlen. To get to the moon you must either have a drop ship (special counter) or traverse the elevator. The elevator method is slow, but there are usually leads to follow up en route.

You can also draw cards (costing one time point) from your Light on someone else's Dark deck. Some spaces have special actions, which can be entertained with a variant time cost, usually along with some costs attached. Finally, you can also follow up leads.

Following up leads

When you land on a space with a 'lead' you can spend one time point to follow it up. You now have two options: delve into the conspiracy (see below) or place 'evidence tokens'.



Each suspect has three areas where evidence can be placed, based on the lead type (document, testimony and physical) – strong, normal and weak. When you pick up evidence you must place the token (taken at random) on the appropriate lead area for whichever suspect you want.

With this mechanism you need to be aware of what leads you follow up, and how it will play on the guilty/innocent party you have in your hand. If your Guilty suspect has strong document leads, then you need to follow-up these leads and start piling them on your suspect to ensure that he turns out to be guilty.

Again here the game has many surprises. The evidence tokens range from +5 to -5 plus two special counters. The aim is to have your guilty suspect with the highest total when all the tokens are added up, and your innocent suspect to have the lowest.

Finally you need to keep an eye on what your opponents are doing to ensure they don't end up with their guilty suspect topping the points.

The Conspiracy

Instead of following up leads with evidence tokens, you can also try to uncover the conspiracy. This is represented by three types of jigsaw puzzles that are attached to an affixed piece. These pieces have routes on the reverse. The aim is to join the piece creating a route from the murder to an organisation.



When you decide to uncover the conspiracy, you have the choice to 'dig deeper' moving onto a better jigsaw piece or to choose the one you are currently on. Each of the conspiracy pieces gives you an immediate benefit, and sometimes special actions, as indicated on the route side of the piece.

Favours

There are four types of favours and they have multiple uses. Some can be used to place 'bad baggage' on other characters, some need to be used to gain the benefit of special spaces on the board. Finally, if a connection has been made to certain organisations on the conspiracy, they are worth victory points at the end of the game.



The end game

Finally, after two weeks the game ends, the suspect evidence tokens are revealed and totalled, and both the guilty and innocent parties are identified.

It is then a case of adding up each player's victory points, and whoever has the highest is the winner.

This means that just because you found the murderer, you may not actually have won, which for some can be an anti-climax.

My overview

As you can see from what I've said about the concepts of the game, **Android** is more like a role-playing game in a box than a board game. Everything in the game has plenty of flavour to it. The suspects have bio's, the player characters have in-depth personalities along with advice on how to play the character.

Every sub-plot and twilight card has a story, and reading the cards out as you play them adds a lot to the game.

There is a lot to take in when you play the game and it is easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer scope of what the designers have achieved here. It is very easy to get caught up in your character's sub-plot and spend time trying to resolve your personal issues rather than investigating anything.

The game is beautifully presented, and though the rules are extensive, it is a very enjoyable game to play. However, be prepared to set aside four hours to have a good go at this, maybe more on your first time.

Finally, there are reams of player-written updates, rules and scenarios on the internet.

My ratings

Value for money: 9/10

Presentation: 9/10

Complexity: 8/10 (complex)

Time to play: 4 hours average

Players: three-five (best with four)



Yes, it takes up some space!!

An Introduction to Miniature Wargames Part 2

The British Connection

DEV SODAGAR continues his new series

MOST WARGAMERS would credit the invention of modern wargaming with H.G. Wells' *Little Wars: A Game for Boys from Twelve Years to One Hundred and Fifty and for that More Intelligent Sort of Girl Who Likes Games and Books* in 1913. Quite apart from the wonderful title, this book was the first to take what had previously been an important tool for military tacticians and turn it into a game. H G Wells was a noted pacifist and in this ruleset he hoped to provide an alternative outlet for aggression. Ever since then, Britain has continued to lead the world in the hobby. Over recent years many European nations as well as America and New Zealand have done a lot to close the gap but Britain is still able to boast some of the finest manufacturers of rules and miniatures. *Games Workshop* is, of course, the obvious example: however, there are many others and in this issue I will be looking at a few of my favourites both for rules and miniatures. In the current economic climate it is hard for companies to make ends meet and with the wargaming market being very much a niche industry, even at the best of times, good companies go under. When you are shopping around, try going for the company that is going to help your market the most: if you live in Britain, go for a British company, if you are in the US then buy from an American company. The internet is a great resource, but brick and mortar stores are better: you can see what you are buying, you don't have to wait on the post or postal strikes, meet like minded people and this is often worth the extra 5-10%.

Urban Mammoth

Urban Mammoth have been on the wargaming scene for a number of years now in various guises. They were previously associated with the popular Sci-fi rules **VOID** which have since fallen into some obscurity. Their current rules sets are modern takes on the original VOID concept with many of the same factions, although the figures themselves have been updated.

Urban War is a smaller skirmish level game that sees soldiers fighting alongside CLAU (manned robots) in a struggle to control the city of Iskandria. As a skirmish game, in *Urban War* the action is focussed around individual models. Though organised into 'strike-teams', each model acts independently when it comes to moving, shooting or reacting to threats. Combat is quick and lethal, and even the lowliest trooper can, with luck, take down a hero or badass battlesuit. The game mechanics encourage players to

take calculated risks. In the right circumstances veteran troops can perform heroic feats that wouldn't look out of place in an action movie. However, nothing is guaranteed: push your luck too far and that same flashy hero can end up stuck out in the open staring helplessly down the barrel of an enemy's gun. The rules can be fiddly but have some interesting mechanics in the form of issuing each figure secret orders at the start of the turn with different actions having different priorities. The game gets bogged down when it comes to combat. The game is a dicefest in this regard with the traditional role to hit, role to wound, role to save that seems to slow even the best game down.



Metropolis moves the action up a level from the small-scale skirmishes played out in *Urban War*. It shifts the focus from the individual to the squad. Players build 'Battle-Forces' of men, machine and aliens to fight in the war torn city-planet of Iskandria.

Each faction has a different battle-force structure. Core units form the basis of each battle-force with players customising these with a mix of support, assault, strike and command units.

Although the rules can be a little cumbersome for these games, what really sells them are the miniatures. Very stylised and nicely detailed, they look like something from *Ghost in the Shell* or a Mecha anime.

Spartan Games

Started by Neil Fawcett and Mark Sims, *Spartan Games* were set for great things from the beginning. Neil was a reporter but came to prominence among the wargaming community as editor of the *Wargames Journal*. Mark is an excellent sculptor and although he has since left the Spartan Team to focus on his own *Crusader Miniatures*, **Uncharted Seas** and the underlying system used by Spartan Games is clearly shaped by his hand.

Spartan games have developed an underlying mechanic that is the same for all of their systems. Ranged combat is done in 'range bands' of 8" increments. At each range band units have a related number which indicates the number of d6 rolled. For each d6 a 4 or 5 counts as a success, a 6 counts as two successes and allows you to roll another dice (this is not limited, keep rolling sixes, and you keep rolling dice!). This allows for Hail Mary style shots to be pulled off. You need the number of successes to exceed a defence value to score a hit or exceed the critical value to score

two hits (and in the case of larger vessels a roll on the critical table). This mechanic is common to *Uncharted Seas* and **Firestorm Armada** and is likely to also be implemented in their upcoming **Death or Glory** rules (40mm skirmish combat designed to work for any time period) due for release next year.



Uncharted Seas was the first release from this company and has been a huge success. The world of fantasy wargamers, myself among them, keenly felt the loss of a naval combat system since Games Workshop discontinued their **Man'o'War** game back in the mid 90s. *Uncharted Seas* has come along and not only filled the gap left by *Man'o'War* but significantly improved on it. *Man'o'War* suffered from a great deal of complexity and cards that took up as much table space as the game itself. *Uncharted Seas* uses *Spartan Games*' basic mechanic that allows games to run very quickly. Movement is a standard measurement in inches and turning implements templates to reflect the turning arcs of ships. The game also has a deck of cards for each race that can be played with if desired. These decks comprise 26 cards (13 are common to all races, 13 are unique to each race). These cards are entirely optional and are included in the starter fleet packs or can be bought separately. The cards introduce aspects such as magic (which can be countered), events, skilled training and luck.

The rules have recently been revised and come in a perfect-bound full colour glossy book of the highest quality for £15. The book provides all the rules you will need to play including pages of the templates, counters and even some sample ship tokens that can be photocopied, cut out and used, however you will need a lot of dice (some rolls may require 14 or more dice!), tape measures and gaming space. The book has quite a few errors in early editions that have resulted in quite a comprehensive FAQ section of the website; however, the revised edition has fixed a lot of these except for a few minor typos. The rules are very much a living ruleset with updates occurring frequently: some examples include the changing point scheme and the orc fleet being fundamentally changed as they proved to be a little overpowered. All of these updates are available for free on the website along with added background materials about the races of the *Uncharted*

Seas. There is still no real campaign system in the rules and it would certainly benefit the game.

The miniatures *Spartan Games* have released alongside *Uncharted Seas* are of the highest quality resin hulls with metal sails, turrets and other additional parts. The resin requires no filing or prep work at all, although they are delicate and occasionally come chipped; *Spartan Games* will replace any damaged parts. The metal components are highly detailed but do have a lot of flash and some mould lines to be cleaned up. The price of a starter fleet ranges between £17.50 and £32 for 10 figures. The starter fleets really do provide a complete fleet with no need to build on these to play the game to its fullest even including turning templates, the cards for that fleet, and counters printed on gloss card.

Uncharted Seas is one of the best miniature wargames out there. Rapid play and simple rules ensure that games are action-packed with the card decks adding some detail to the play that makes games into events, generating stories that will spark 'remember the time when'-s and 'when I...'-s. This game is not only a must buy but a must play, must live and must breathe. This game will get under your skin in a way you can't prepare yourself for.

I had also hoped to review *Firestorm: Armada* as the latest release from *Spartan Games* due out on November 23rd; however at the time of writing this I have been unable to secure a copy.

Too Fat Lardies

Too Fat Lardies are the UK's largest independent publisher of wargames rules and supplements with in excess of fifty products produced. They produce the original **Prussian Army Kriegsspiel** rules that started the hobby off in 1824. Because they have so many rulesets, I am only covering two of their more popular releases which cover the two ends of the spectrum of their games. **Sharp's Practice** is the lightest of their rulesets with a heroic mentality that is quite different from **Through the Mud and the Blood**, a WWI ruleset that tries to realistically reflect the psychological impact of trench warfare on troop actions. Two of the major features of *Too Fat Lardies* rulesets are the use of cards and the concept of hidden movement using 'blinds'. Blinds are particularly effective with any terrain piece such as the shell of a building or a copse of trees able to hide people... really increasing the paranoia that the troops would experience. The card system is less successful in my opinion. Although the building and use of these decks is a great idea providing racial quirks, heroism and the like, the cards have to be printed out and self assembled. I am not great at papercraft and making a deck of cards where each card looks the same is a negative in my mind. In the end I got a few decks of cheap cards and wrote on them with black markers so you can't tell what card you've drawn from the poorly cut out shape. I understand that there is

an additional cost in producing cards, but as such a fundamental mechanic to the games, purchasing them should at least be an option.

Sharp Practice

These rules are named after Bernard Cornwell's famous character from the Napoleonic wars although the rules are not limited to Napoleonic conflict. Sharp attempts to generate the feel of a fiction book, seeing heroic leaders of otherwise unexceptional men engaged in skirmish level conflicts. The rules are very much written in the style of Imperialist Britain which can take a little getting used to and sometimes clashes with the PC sensibilities of today. The rules contain lots of information on military structure on the battlefield and the quirks of each nation as well as the military thinking of the black powder era. They are mostly well laid out and easy to pick up, although for anyone unfamiliar with historical settings, an index of terms would have been helpful.

Through the Mud and the Blood

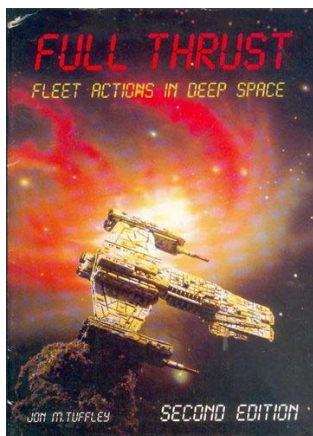
The First World War was a dark time that marked a change in the world that people simply weren't prepared for. Armies were ordered according to tactics from the previous century that simply weren't adapted to the technological advancements that had come about. Mud & Blood looks at aspects like bottle, early tanks, artillery and how important it was. The rules also include some very informative sections on the way each nation fought and the different artillery tactics used. Unlike Sharp's Practice the cards aren't included in the rules themselves but can be found online.

Ground Zero Games

The first thing to point out is that all of the rulesets GZG produce are free and available for download from their website. They are a miniatures company and the rules simply provide a game for people to use the miniatures in. The rules are open and enable players to create their own ships or adapt the rules to other sets of miniatures. GZG uses simulation style rulesets trying to ensure accuracy in combats resulting in slightly more complex rules that feel more like a historical ruleset in many ways.

Full Thrust

Full Thrust was my first introduction into GZG and it was the miniatures that really sold it to me. Having been established for almost 20 years (as with **Dirtside** & **Stargrunt**) there is a huge range of figures, not just for armies but transports, pirates and the like. The



game provides simple, fast-play rules that can be used with any size of Starfleet. The light version of the rules of play can be learned in just a few minutes. The game has huge variety and flexibility with complete ship construction and costing rules, campaign rules and battle scenarios and backgrounds for the factions.

Stargrunt II

Stargrunt II is a comprehensive set of generic rules for simulating science-fiction infantry combat in virtually any background. The system covers actions from a few squads up to full company level. Rules are included for infantry, powered armored troops, AFVs, artillery and aerospace support and much, much more. The game has a flexible integrated game sequence, minimal record keeping and a brilliant system of distinguishing troop quality. The game encourages the players to think tactically. There are rules for troop confidence, motivation, suppression and much more. The game is designed for use with 25mm or 15mm scale miniatures.

Dirtside II

Dirtside II is a more 'epic level' take on Stargrunt. The system covers combined-arms actions from a few platoons up to a full battalion combat group level. Rules are included for infantry, AFVs of all types, artillery, aerospace support and landings, combat walkers and much more. The game is designed for use with 1:300/1:285 scale miniatures but will function equally well with 1:200 or other scales. The game has a flexible integrated game sequence, chartless combat system, vehicle design and points value system and more. Rules aren't the only aspect of the hobby and for many the miniatures are a much more important part: here too, Britain is not found wanting. Some of the finest miniature sculptors can be found here and many of them were originally trained by *Games Workshop* before moving on to do their own things.

Wargames

Foundry

Generally known as *The Foundry*,



this is one of the oldest miniature wargames manufacturers out there. Focused on 28mm *The Foundry* offers a huge range of figures covering Sci-Fi, Fantasy, and almost any historic period you can think of, there is even a range of animals.

Heresy

Heresy, *Hasslefree* and *Black Scorpion* all co-exist under the *Forum of Doom* (FoD) banner. At conventions you will usually see the three stalls adjacent to each other.



This unusual co-operative method seems to work well for these companies. There is also one other thing that

all three companies share, exquisite sculpts. They don't make miniatures for any specific ruleset, focusing more on sculpting figures to the very highest detail to work well as set pieces for any game or even just be decorative. The figures from all three companies are among the more expensive with a standard 28mm character costing £3-5; they are, however, well worth this price, being of a much better sculpting quality than most ranges.

Heresy specialise in monstrous creatures like minotaurs, ogres and a much-awaited dragon. They also have a range of figures for **Deathball**, which is a fantasy football game for which they have recently made a set of beta rules. The figures are great for stocking dungeons for RPGs (especially if they are crypts!) and also giving a bit of variety to a **Blood Bowl** or **Elf Bowl** team.



Hasslefree

The most prolific of the FoD companies, *Hasslefree* have a wide range of figures including zombies, modern/sci-fi heroes and the ever popular Grymm space dwarves. They are a husband and wife team: Kevin White does the majority of the sculpting while his wife Sally runs the business side of things. *Hasslefree* pride themselves on their first-class customer service and with good reason. Orders will usually include a couple of sweets, a leaflet letting customers know what is going on with the family and the company, sometimes there is even a free figure in there!

Black Scorpion

Probably the most specialised of the FoD companies, the majority of their figures are fantasy wild west or pirate themed. The sculpts are also a little larger than the other two, being 32mm rather than the 28-30mm *Hasslefree* and *Heresy* provide.



Black Hat

Black Hat Miniatures was formed in 2004 with the aim of specialising in producing high quality 18mm wargames figures.



In August 2006, they purchased *Gladiator Miniatures* and *Coat D'Arms* paints from *Gladiator Games* and

started to produce the figures rather than outsourcing the casting and mouldmaking. *Black Hat* now own the rights to ranges from *Outcast Miniatures*, *Crusader Miniatures* and the Dragon Kings Chinese range from *BC Miniatures* as well as developing other new ranges. Their *Coat D'Arms* paints in particular are in my opinion the finest miniature paints out there. In fact they are the same paints that *Games Workshop* used before they switched to a French company in the late 90s. Mark Sims' **Shattered Isles** figures are also to be found under the *Black Hat* banner and are well worth looking out for. *Black Hat* also do a wide range of accessories for the wargaming hobby including magnetic basing and *Baueda* scenery.

Perry Miniatures

The Perry twins have produced some of the finest and most famous of Games Workshop figures with many of the *Lord of the Rings* figures being their creation. They have since gone on to form their own company. Whilst smaller than their former employers, the quality of their sculpts hasn't diminished at all. They now focus exclusively on historical miniatures and in the last year they have started producing the world's first range of historical wargaming plastics that have significantly reduced the cost of getting into this side of the hobby.

Kerr & King

A company that I only recently encountered, *Kerr & King* make resin scenics, terrain and bases in a variety of scales. I picked up some of their display bases for use on one of my figures. The sculpt quality is excellent and their customer service is also very good. If you like to have your figures really stand out on the table, you have to get some of these bases, they will have as much if not more detail than your figure.



If you feel I have missed out any key companies, let me know and I will try to cover them in a future issue. Also if you have your own company doing miniature rules, figures, scenery or anything related, let me know (dev@ragados.com) and I will try to cover your products. In my next article I will look at how you can get started in the hobby, what you'll need, how much it'll all cost, and most importantly how to do it without bankrupting yourself!

Carol's Logbook

With all the latest news about turn-based games

The Glory of Kings, Company Commander, The One Ring, Kin Strife and DungeonWorld...

Wargames

THOSE OF you who enjoy open-ended, mixed-moderated wargames without a fantasy element, of the kind that are run by *Agema Publications*, will be interested to hear that there's a new supplement booklet out for their **The Glory of Kings**. Called *Advice to Princes*, this isn't up on *Agema's* website yet but is available for existing players of the game.

Agema's website is being completely revamped, but moderator Richard Watts warns that 'the amount of work involved in doing this is huge so it'll be a while before the online website shows the fruits of this... The amount of information for supported games will be vastly increased, with more in-depth information on the games, archived pdf newspapers, maps, details of player positions, and so on freely available—making it more than just a shop, which basically is what it is at the moment.'

If you'd like a regular update on *Agema's* progress, note that they issue a pdf flyer every one to two months. It's possible to register for these flyers with an email to:

agema@hotmail.co.uk

Jason Oates now has a website: those of you interested in trying winnable turn-based wargame without a fantasy element should check out **Ancient Empires** or **Company Commander** with its modern-day South American setting at:

www.jason-oates-games.com

Fantasy Wargames

Moving on to Fantasy Wargames, it's exciting to be able to announce that *Microcosm Games'* new **The One Ring** has now been launched on the *Facebook* platform. Its players take on the role of the heroes of JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* to struggle against Sauron.

Led by two well-known names from the PBM industry, Sam Roads of *Harlequin Games* and Clint Oldridge of *Middle-Earth PBM*, the *Microcosm* team also includes other experienced turn-based game designers and moderators, like Edward Lane of **Legends** and John Davis who's moderated **Crack of Doom**, **Enchanted Isle** and **Exile**. It'll be interesting to see how the new game takes off from their well-practised hands, for a new platform and a new audience.

We're told that 'The game possesses high quality graphics and sound, as well as compelling Tolkien-style narration and story development provided by trained

actors and writers, in an attempt to recreate the fantasy and magic of Tolkien's masterpiece. The game is very much a labour of love, with all involved seeking to retain and respect Tolkien's vision.' This all sounds very promising!

It is also good news that the basic game is free to play, with various additional options which will require payment. There's more information about the game on *Microcosm's* website:

www.oneringgame.com

To play in it, visit the Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/apps/application.php?id=43479470339

Continuing the theme of new Tolkien-based games, *Middle-earth Games* are now running their *Kin Strife* module of *Legends*, which combines the *Legends* system with a Middle-earth setting. Its moderator Clint Oldridge reports 'Within three days we had three games filled, but decided the prudent approach was to try one game first and see how things went. Players are impressed by the new coloured art, the ability to create your own nation within guidelines, so it's not a free for all, and looking forward to testing out *Champion* characters.'

Adventure Games

Moving on to Adventure Games, *Madhouse* are continuing their inventive approach by opening as many as five new areas in **Dungeonworld**. Yes, that's right--five! One is in the *Steamworx* area, where the people from *Derwent* have been seeking to rid their land of a mysterious ailment which caused nature to turn against them. Entitled *Secrets Best Forgotten*, this new module offers a chance to explore the huge labyrinth beneath *Derwent City*, where lost secrets of magic and technology lie forgotten. The second is placed in the jungle land of *Frontier* as *The Lost Palace of the Monkey King* and promises ruins filled with treasures. However, these treasure are not undefended!

The other three new areas are set in the main module, the kingdom of *Bereny*. *In the Name of the Raven* features a mixed force set up on the border between *Poldoon* and *Kyr*; *Blood Runs Red* offers the prospect of rediscovering the lost castle of the First Vampire; in *Run, Run As Fast As You Can* members of the *Unseely Court* are hunting for the *Gingerbread Man*, with plenty of danger to face in this process. As

moderator Steve Tierney points out, 'Of course, if you've gotta die, being murdered by Killer Candy is one cool way to go...'

Plenty going on, eh? We can add that *Madhouse* are also planning to start *The Time of Thunder*, which they see this as an extension of *Daemonrift II* in which its survivors discover that instead of returning to present-day Bereny, they have been transported back into the past, where the malevolent daemons plan to start building up sufficient forces to win the war a second time round ... eek...

www.madcentral.com

Role-playing Games

Our congratulations to *Antony Dunks*, who will celebrate the 25th birthday of his **Xott** this year. Twenty-five years is an impressive achievement for a hand-moderated game. Antony plans to present all his current players with a virtual token to spend in next year's game: on equipment, spells and even—here's an interesting idea--by suggesting new game features to work into how Xott will play next year.

www.sark.net/-xott

Tribal Games

We're pleased to announce that John May has revived **Clans** and is now ready to launch game 2 of this classic tribal game. Contact:

www.PhantasieProductions.net

Seeking Playtesters

Peter and Johan Norberg are looking for playtesters for a new PbeM game, **Fate of a Nation**. In this, you play a small community that has the chance to grow into an empire.

There are seven races to choose between: Dwarf, Ende (who sound rather sinister), Elf, Greenskins, Human, Korant (who are swarming insects) or Mercans (who are amphibious reptiles). Each race can research appropriate technologies and there are religions and a diplomatic system which will allow you to form alliances. Interestingly, the game will be played on two levels—the surface and the netherworld—which sounds as if it will offer novel opportunities. The same basic charge will be made for all positions, whatever their size.

Peter Norberg reports that there will be an order editor with your game reports, and that two software writers are busily developing the game.

The beta test started in February. Turns in the playtest were free, of course, with the chance to continue as a paying player once the game is formally launched.

Interested? Apply to:

www.news.fateofanation.net/

Returning to PBM

Long-time players will remember *Gad Games* and its founder, Sean Cleworth. *Gad* were a major British firm back in the glory days of PBM gaming, running games which included **World of Chaos**, **Soccer Supremos**, **Battle of the Planets**, **Austerlitz** and an early version of **Middle Earth**. You will also remember that *Gad* closed down in the middle of the 1990s when Sean himself moved to South Africa, losing touch with turn-based gaming.

We've now heard from him again, saying that 'I have very fond memories of *Gad Games* and PBM in general and have been designing a game for a number of years that will capture the great qualities of postal gaming while harnessing the new technologies of the internet and specifically the web... Without giving too much away, I think I've found a theme and technical approach that enriches the player's experience.' Sounds promising, eh?

The game is to be an open-ended single character fantasy RPG, with fixed turn-arounds, called **Ilkor: Dark Rising**. Sean expects it to be free to play, with the beta test starting at the end of 2010. Meanwhile, he's interested in hearing from anyone who remembers *Gad Games*, 'to talk about the good old days.' He invites past players to do this via his 'quick and simple website, which over time will be expected to contain relevant content':

www.gadgames.com

Absolute Power

Readers who remember the much-praised **Absolute Power** will be interested to learn that designer Justin Parsler mentions his work on the game in his blog:

www.justingames.com

Saturnalia

The venerable roleplaying PBM has been recorded for posterity in Wikipedia:

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturnalia_\(PBM\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturnalia_(PBM))

An exercise is also in progress to capture material from a number of the famous *Saturnalia* campaigns:

www.throneworld.com/wiki/index.php?title=Saturnalia

Personal News

We're delighted to announce that Richard and Jeanette Watts of *Agema Publications* now have a baby girl, who will be christened Lydia. Due on 28th December, she arrived thirteen days later: speaking from personal experience, it's a wise move to avoid a Christmas birthday. Our best wishes to all three!

Carol's Dispatches

All the general game news that's reached your editor's desk ...

TO START with a correction: please note that last issue's illustration for the boardgame **Automobile** may have been jolly, but it was not an official one. Our apologies for the mistake. Check the standard board shown at:

www.boardgamegeek.com/image/485764

Some exciting specialist news from *Agema Publications*. We hear that work is on-going to develop a new set of WW2 naval wargame rules for playing games with model ships or counters:

www.agema.org.uk

Psychic Software report that they are currently working on a set of missions for new players of their online game **Darkwind: War on Wheels**. Completing these will earn you your 'Darkwind Veteran' badge. 'It will essentially be a tour of many of the core game features, designed to be fun, written in a narrative style, and mostly to make sure the new player becomes comfortable with the game without being overwhelmed by its vast array of features...' And yes, this does sound like a really useful way to learn to settle into a game:

www.dark-wind.com

The *RPGNow* website deals with independent Roleplaying Games, and in early December it was publicising various useful-sounding aids for the harried Games-Master. There are booklets dealing with suitable names, for instance—Japanese and Anglo-Saxon among them, as well as modern ones. (I expect that you'll already know that the usual tip for novelists is to name your characters after places and your places after people.) There are also collections of descriptive passages for various locations, like wildernesses, starports and dungeons, and for events like banquets. It's also possible to buy materials for horror games, which seem particularly appropriate during the dark nights of our so-called festive season. (Cackle, cackle, cackle ... aargh!)

Now, they are offering *Fantasy Flight's* **Warhammer: Dark Heresy** as a pdf download. In this, you play an acolyte of the Inquisition in Warhammer's dark locations, charged with discovering and rooting out heresies. For more on these items and other RPG information, look at:

RPGNow.com

A reply to an enquiry about playing boardgames over the net that appeared on our website brought the useful suggestion of trying this website:

www.itsyourturn.com

Yes, this does look like a useful site for such a gaming purpose and one that seems easy to get into, with a whole host of well-known games. Indeed, they offer over 80 different games and variants, all of which can be played for free. Thank you, 'Ariadne'.

Also on the theme of tabletop games, Chris Geggus reports that the October meeting of the *Weekend Gaming Group* at The Duke's Head in Wallington was a successful occasion, with 23 players including three newcomers. This may not seem a huge number compared with attendance at conventions, but it's easily large enough for players from Manchester and surrounding towns to try out a range of games in convivial surroundings. Chris stresses that newcomers are always welcomed at these weekends and that accommodation is offered at the pubs involved.

Dragonmeet passed successfully at Kensington Town Hall in London on Saturday November 28th, with 650-675 people attending. This may not sound a tremendous number when compared with attendance numbers at *US GenCon* or *Spiel* (see *Pevans's Perspective* in this issue for more about this latter event), but the numbers were easily large enough to fill the venue for a one-day get-together.

Numerous games were being eagerly played by people glad of the chance to meet other RPG devotees. I very much enjoyed the event myself, though I should admit to being a little thrown by needing to get up at 5am to catch my train up from Devon, and then nearly wiped out by a nightmare journey back home again, thanks to delays caused by a signals failure. It was lovely to have the chance to say Hello to so many stallholders and players, though, and I do intend to return to *Dragonmeet* in 2010. Congratulations to the organisers!

www.dragonmeet.co.uk

One British convention I'm definitely planning to attend is *UK Games Expo 2010* over 4th-6th July in Birmingham. Already the organising committee is working hard to make sure that it's as successful as the 2009 convention was. I've certainly enjoyed my visits in past years and found the event an inspiration. Come past the Flagship table to say hello if you can make it there. All the enticing details are clearly listed at:

www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk

I regret that I cannot reach *Con-Quest 2010* at the Derby Assembly Rooms on April 10th, because it's too far from Devonshire for a day-trip. Maybe I'll be able to make it next year, when it's planned to stretch over a weekend. This used to be 'Dragonmeet Midlands' and

sounds like being a very busy one-day show and something to look forward to. Check the website at:

www.con-quest.co.uk

Earlier this issue, we congratulated Rick Loomis of *Flying Buffalo* for being about to reach his firm's 40th anniversary. He invites all his players, past and present, to a celebratory barbeque at FBI's annual convention in July.

Some welcome news is that FBI's early card game, **Nuclear War**, is now playable online for free. There's a link on FBI's web page. Also FBI is now the US agent for a couple of card-games from the Swedish-based *Gottick Games*, whom we interviewed in issue #128. The two card games available are **Comrade Koba** and **Supermarket Psycho**:

www.flyingbuffalo.com

Still in the genre of card games, we've mentioned *Warrior Elite's War for Edadh* in previous issues, both interviewing its designers and reviewing the game. Edadh (which uses Celtic spelling – it's pronounced 'Edath') is unusual in being much closer to tabletop wargames than most other card games and it certainly isn't a CCG. Now a new section of the game is to be released at the end of April: *War Unleashed*. Designer Nigel Pyne describes this new version as 'a full tabletop battle experience... where strategy in deployment and out-maneuvring the enemy is key.'

The rulebook for this extension is £13.99, with

supplementary material available for downloading from:



www.warriorelite.com

On December 11th, *The Guardian's* review section was largely devoted to video games. A good article pointed out that 'It's hard to make games interesting in print or on TV, especially to non-players...' and explained that this is mainly because newcomers don't understand how the games work. Nine games are suggested as good starter games—**Canabalt**, **Peggle**, **Flower**, **Professor Lepton and the Curious Village**, **Portal**, **Grand Theft Auto IV**, **Left 4 Dead** and **Fallout**. *Charlie Brooker*, the section's initial writer, argues that 'If you don't play games, you're not just missing out, you're wilfully ignoring the most rapidly evolving creative medium in human history.' It's so good to be able to have it confirmed that here at *Flagship* we really are on nodding terms with creativity!

guardian.co.uk/games

We've now heard about a new independent game from an applications firm based in Liverpool, England. The firm is called *Onteca* and this, their first game, is **Monsteca Corral**, with its launch scheduled for January 2010 on the *Nintendo Wii*. They describe it as a 'puzzle-strategy game'. Players have the task of herding strange orange creatures across the land, who will need help to avoid being dismembered by invading robots.

www.onteca.com

<h2>DRAGONHELM</h2>  <p>The struggle for power, glory and wealth goes on</p> <p>Bledal is an unhappy realm, where the High King is a child and the Regent is an upstart. Evil forces are rising and demons walk abroad. Those who can read the stars are filled with fear.</p> <p>Ulaidh Games 62 Beechgrove Avenue, Belfast, BT6 0NF</p>	<h2>EINSTEIN'S LOT</h2> <p>"Things are not only queerer than we imagine, they are queerer than we can imagine"</p>  <p>The past is the darkest influence on the present, even in modern day Britain</p> <p>Take your place in a medieval style world or a modern occult mystery.</p> <table><tr><td>Start-up turns and one turn</td><td>£4-50</td></tr><tr><td>Subsequent turns</td><td>£3-50</td></tr></table>	Start-up turns and one turn	£4-50	Subsequent turns	£3-50
Start-up turns and one turn	£4-50				
Subsequent turns	£3-50				

Rumours from the Front

Your uncensored comments on the games you play

Comments received from: Michael Bitton, Andrew Collins, Martin Helsdon, Bill Moore, John Tindall

Turn-based Games

Company Commander (*Jason Oates*)

John Tindall – ‘Company Commander is a squad level, turn-based game set in a nameless South American country in the recent past. Players are guerrilla factions seeking to replace the disintegrating government. Whilst captivating and detailed, the game has quite a few wrinkles that detract from play. For example, allies can’t occupy the same locations at the same time, the rulebook had numerous inconsistencies (since corrected) and the order spreadsheets required lots of manual entry (would benefit from some vlookup functions). GM Jason Oates is responsive and helpful and yet the game has a definite “work in progress” feel about it, whilst charging £5 a turn. I’ll do a full report in issue #131.’

[We offered **Jason** the Right of Reply, to which he responded, ‘The new game of Company Commander has started and, as with all new things, it has needed some changes. With the help and input of the players, all of the glitches have been ironed out and the game can now go from strength to strength. As with all of my games, they are updated regularly with improvements to keep the whole thing as fresh as possible.’]

DungeonWorld (*Madhouse*)

Bill Moore--‘*Main Game* (*Bereny*): Whilst the expeditionary party out at Castle Lexor attempts to discover its less-than-ubiquitous Lord thereof, the rest of us as filling up the time we’re not spending driving the main plot by doing the things we all like to do in our spare time: beheading goblins, disembowelling elves, defenestrating trolls and so on. And robbing their corpses, of course. Just the things a goodly adventurer has to do, you know! On a more slightly-plot-related bent, one of Bereny’s foremost guilds, the Bereny Eagle Elite Fighters (BEEF to its friends) has had the unfortunate problem of losing both its Leader and its Deputy Leader in short order. Barely a few weeks after Major Cibelle Lockshear was surprised by a six-man Shellian (turtle-like people) unit creeping up behind her deep in the Torlian Catacombs, the famous Leader of BEEF, the “Brain in a Jar” himself, General Grout, was finally brought down by a mass of red tarantulas in Pendleton Keep. The “Brain in a Jar” thing wasn’t a nickname, by the way. That’s all that was left of him after an earlier unfortunate, if not quite as fatal, mishap.

BEEF is now searching its ranks for appropriate personages to promote into these newly available positions. Goblins need not apply...’

Estate Position—‘My estate position’s financial standing has improved considerably recently. Whilst previously only setting records for an unheard-of level of back taxes unpaid, a load of 3000 gold from a friendly (and generous!) priest has put us on an even financial keel for the first time in ages. I’ve even celebrated the occasion by hiring some new staff: a Wagon Master, a Miner, a Settlement Planner and a Master Thief. Not sure what they all do yet, though. Not entirely sure I *want* to know in the case of the Master Thief. In the matter of the pair of Murder Trees leaving the nearby Farlow Forest, we have at last had some success. Druidess Eris Coedwr has managed to smite one of the possessed trees with her blessed elm staff, the one nearest to my estate in fact. The bad news is that another such tree, known as “Cherry Fright”, has emerged from the forest near my neighbour Baroness Twang’s estate. More fighting to be done, I think!’

Kyr—‘My position has been rocked by the death of “honest” Roger Wrangell, my Human Alchemist. Whilst not a notable fighter, Mr Wrangell had acquired the distinction of being one of the few characters in Kyr to acquire the Kyrian Herbalist skill. A tortuous overland journey to an Herbalist’s Hovel, escorted only by a mercenary Dark Aslani, Pollaxe, was required, and followed by an equally exhausting trip back to the civilisation of the City of Splendours. This skill allowed him to gather ingredients for and brew the Elixirs of Restitution, equivalent to the ever available Healing Ointments in Bereny. Such ointments are desperately hard to come by in Kyr, though, so I thought Roger’s new skill could prove immensely valuable. He brewed up one batch of elixirs, if “brew” is the right word as a major ingredient was camel dung! Then he walked out of the city gates to search for more ingredients and promptly got killed by a Minor Sand Lich, within a few steps of safety. Bah! I had such high hopes of a lucrative career for him, too.’

Kyrian Settlement Position – ‘Ticking over nicely still. A snake charmer I sent off to scout nearby (having been unable to find him any snakes to charm!) has discovered a nearby settlement abandoned in the harsh desert, its tents turned to rags and its peoples dispersed. Perhaps my Bella Laguna will end up like that, one day? Anyway, the charmer, Snookums, reports he has found a large variety of items and gold in the ruins and will be returning with them promptly on his wondrous flying carpet. I would be more pleased if the carpet hadn’t proved to be such a darn slow form of

transportation, travelling at mere walking pace! Heck, if you found a road, you could actually out-walk the thing! Somehow, when my carpet-maker graciously presented me with one of the items, I imagined zipping swiftly over the dunes, out-speeding the wind itself. Uh-uh! It goes up, pootles about a bit, and then comes down again. Wondrous floating carpet would be a more appropriate name, methinks!

SteamWorx—‘Well, my terrible twosome finally drag themselves over to the temple of Skills, where mechanical men teach some skills exclusive to the peoples of Derwent. This actually proves the first good move they have made since their arrival in this damned province. They go into the temple mere mortals and come out terrifically butch. Enhancing health, defences and all other statistics. They may actually be up to the task of “liberating” the City of Derwent from whatever has befallen it. That’s not exactly known at the moment, except that it’s really, *really* bad. Even more enhancement may be required before that comes about. Still, a sojourn at the temple at least gives them a chance to acquire some new friends and allies. Maybe with another hundred more or so they will finally feel brave enough to venture inside the gates of Derwent City itself.’

Land of the Dead—‘Well, Cibelle finally comes across an Oath Shrine where she can swear fealty to one of the five Lords of the Dead. In the nick of time, too, on the fifth day itself, when her body was due to dissipate and leave her even more dead than she was, if you see what I mean? Anyway, she decides to cleave to the White Lady, if not exactly a benign figure, then at least not as downright nasty as some of the other Lords. The lady gifts her a white scarf and bids her to fight the undead of these lands until she has proven her worth and can enter the Lady’s lands. Oh well, back to monster butt-kicking for now, I guess. Strange how death seems so like life, isn’t it? Spotting a nearby dungeon entrance Cibelle climbs downwards and finds herself in “The Crypt of the Blood Torn Lich”. I hope the Lady doesn’t intend her to take on the said beast alone. Sounds nasty!’

Brokenlands—‘The Slythian Fellowship suffers an unfortunate casualty as veteran priestess Chatterbug rather unexpectedly wanders into a lava pit. This uncharacteristic action reduces the fellowship to its smallest since very near its beginnings, many years ago. Barely seven members survive now. Though we be smaller than we once were, we are no less determined, however, and are moving through the watery depths of the Keldassi Flow towards the grassy uplands of Pleasant Meadows. Though this is the second time we have visited the flow, we have actually determined our way out of the Brokenlands now, and our steps have far more purpose than they did those years ago. Brother Kharan, Slythian Fellowship.’

Fate of a Nation (*Peter & Johan Norberg*)

Martin Helsdon—‘The beta test continues, with the eighth turn just processed and eighteen active nations in the game. A few minor quibbles as the design team develop the game engine, with the first “follow up” complete and improvements being made to resolve issues raised by the test players. A new “royal family” feature is about to be added. Fate of the Nation has all the makings of an excellent game.’

Lands of Androhil (*Bob Fry*)

Bill Moore—‘Dwarrin and friend Cliarra seem to have exhausted the levels under the Dwarven City and are currently returning to the City itself to sell off all their ill-gotten gains and obtain new equipment and training. This turn I rather messed up the syntax of the sell command and managed to sell only one of each item Dwarrin holds rather than his entire stock of the said items. Duh! Oh well, try again. The clever orders programme recognises Basic English orders but sometimes the syntax rules can confuse—if item #3782 is 6 carnivorous teeth and you order “take #3782 from backpack”, it will take *one* carnivorous teeth from your backpack to sell, not the whole six. This is where I went wrong.’

Lizards (*Madhouse*)

Bill Moore—‘Game CO1: Up to turn 16 now and a pair of co-operating players, RED and NOX, have broken away from the rest of us. The remaining players (me included) have attacked them en masse for our very survival, but many fear the game is lost. I’m actually in third at the moment, largely due to finally taking THA’s home den. I may not hold it for long, though, as he has a couple of bands of 300 lizards just outside, ready to attack next turn (300 is the maximum you can have in a single hex). I haven’t a border with RED, so I have concentrated my attacks on NOX, but unfortunately he seems to have a surfeit of black (spell-casting) lizards at the moment, and tends to curse a hex whenever I get a large force together, killing all therein and reducing dens to nothing. Unfortunately, I have mostly red (standard) and grey (den and bridge-building) lizards and might never get near enough to press home a decent attack at this rate.’

Serim Ral (*Incubus Designs*)

Bill Moore—‘SR26 (*Ancient Realms*) Turn 161—‘Well, I think we may be getting on top militarily now as one of the opposition’s lead schemers managed to break through my heavily-defended lines... only to immediately drop out!?! Go figure, as they say. Elsewhere, a scheme to corner the seven Scrolls of Zervan and (finally) call down the gods goes slightly astray as my ally Dantalus captures the nearby city (you need to own the land to dig for a buried artefact) and heads off to dig for it, only for an unruly independent player to use troops cast on a hidden thief to retake it.’

No city, no digging, no artefact! Back to square one. We still haven't managed to nail a full set of seven yet, despite getting close all too many times. Methinks the gods have it in for us!

AR35 (Ancient Realms) Turn 43—‘Post our re-ordering this SR planet into two balanced alliances, I'm having a hard time of it still. Being attacked in the north and south simultaneously with little allied forces nearby to support is pretty tough. Still, 2:1 beats the 5:1 I was up against earlier in the game and my new position is strategically a lot better than my old. It's been give and take so far. I've picked up a couple of neutral cities but gained and lost two others to the invading forces. Finely balanced at the moment, I think I'm going to have to take a few risks to break out of this cycle.’

BOARDGAMES RUMOURS

The Settlers of Catan 5-6 player Extension (*Mayfair Games*)

Andrew Collins – ‘My wife and I played Settlers of Catan frequently and always used the expansion. Now we play Cities and Knights of Catan and still always use the 5-6 player original expansion. Why? This gives us lots of room to expand to our hearts' content and play to 20 points! This expansion just adds some additional tiles, cards, and pieces but they are needed. Now we rarely play with more than four people because we feel so restricted on what we can do. Although it was made so that six people can play we feel that what this expansion does is make it so that more than two people can play comfortably.’

Memoir 44 (*Days of Wonder*)

Andrew Collins – ‘Memoir 44 is a much needed game. I love wargames but I do not like to having to read a novel to understand and play the game. Most of my friends do not want to learn or invest the time in playing a long game. I do not mind learning complex systems but it is not fun playing alone and I do not have the time for it. Memoir 44 solves both. Yes it is not as in-depth as full fledged war game covering the same period *but* I can teach people in 20 minutes or less how to play this game and one round takes no more than an hour. My family enjoys this game and the questions and research that have come out of playing Memoir 44 have been stimulating. Wonderful items in the box. Quality. Pure quality. Looking for something fun that does not consume all your time but yet requires strategy and brain power? Memoir 44 is for you. And your friends will want to play as well...’

Hammer of the Scots (*Columbia Games*)

Andrew Collins – ‘This game, while short in rules, is not short in strategy or tactics. It has a quick learning curve and is not bogged down in the typical war game minutia. The cards add a real element of strategy. The dice do have a tendency to create a luck factor.

However it does not seem to be excessive when coupled with the other game stratagems and tends to balance itself out. Highly recommended if you like war games. I would also recommend this as an entry-level game. Don't take me the wrong way when I make this last statement. This is a game that seasoned war gamers will enjoy but they might find the rules too simple.’

Tide of Iron (*Fantasy Flight Games*)

Andrew Collins – ‘Knowing from friends that this game was rule intensive didn't dissuade me from picking up this game, though I didn't realize how detailed the rules were. In the end, I was immensely satisfied with the experience that this game provides. I love pieces! And this game does not disappoint with the abundance of armour and infantry pieces and great cardboard tokens. This game reminds me a lot of an older game, **Panzer General**, but it's not a clone at all. The first interesting concept is unit customization. You can choose who is in the squad and, if the scenario has it, what specializations they possess, such as medics, anti-armour, flamethrowers etc. This adds a lot of depth and character to the game that I feel defines a lot about this game. The combat system is simple, though it still takes in to account terrain, distance from target, and how well entrenched the enemy is. And you can choose from standard fire to suppressive fire, which allows you to make key decisions, such as kill your enemy, or make it so they can't react to your advance of the rest of your soldiers. A 5-star combat system. There is a copious amount of material I could cover, but I'll leave it on this. A *long* game (taking a few hours at best) with a great combat system to make this game a strategy intensive, and wholly gratifying experience. I'd strongly recommend it for anyone who has the patience to learn the rules and teach them to others. Worth buying!’

Titan (*Valley Games*)

Andrew Collins – ‘The rules are incredibly elegant. There's a wide variety of choices to be made in both strategic and tactical situations. The core mechanics are very simple, all based upon a six-sided die. This is *the* most balanced war game you will find. By placing it in a fantasy setting instead of an actual battle you can focus on your ability to strategically and tactically control your troops. No other game can match it. An "old school" game that takes longer than those made today. But the time is justified by the challenge. The attention to detail is so complete that every single piece in the game is unique’

MOG RUMOURS

Blitz 1941 (*E-Fusion MOG*)

Michael Bitton – ‘Blitz 1941 is a 2D historical tank battle sim MMO based upon real conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II. The game features over 60 real tanks to choose from to

do battle in 15 Soviet cities, each a strategic point based on its real-life counterpart. Players may choose sides, pick the tank they want (as each side's assortment varies) and customize his or her experience. Enhancing the gameplay is the ability to travel from one city to the next to fight in a siege for occupation. The winning side gains strategic advantages such as supplies and economic might. Other PvP options include one-on-one fights or simultaneous 200-player combat. Tank armour and other aspects can be customized, and there is a player economy for trades.

Blitz 1941 is free to download and play. It is supported by an item shop, where upgrades may be purchased. I've only played a little so far, but it seems woefully under developed and lacking in features and the indefinable "stuff" that makes you keep playing a game.'

Aion (NCSoft)

Michael Bitton – 'Developed by publishing giant NCSoft for both the Western and Korean markets, Aion features impressive visuals and innovative gameplay elements, making it unique amongst its peers. Set in a world divided in two, the race of the light and the race of the darkness are in a constant struggle with each other and with a third NPC race, creating a dynamic that the developers call PvPvE. I like **Aion** quite a bit, but disagree with 'Morg' in the last issue of *Flagship* – the game simply is not up to the standard of **Lord of the Rings Online** or **World of Warcraft**. The campaign quests are all fun, and the writing overall is well done, but not nearly to the extent that it is in those two games. Although the game world is beautiful, really beautiful, the game play is less attractive. Soloing is repetitive and grindy, besieging forts is incredibly resource-hungry and crashes most computers and it's regrettably hard to make your character unique in any way. A shame. A real shame.'

Feedback

Your comments on *Flagship*

CAROL MULHOLLAND sifts through the postbag concerning issues 128 and 129 ...

WE SEEM TO be getting fewer feedback comments than we once were. I suspect that this isn't because we are close to achieving perfection, though there's no harm in hoping, but mainly because news and gossip is becoming more oriented towards the internet. Of course, what we do receive is always of interest to your humble editor.

One new reader has complained that our approach to games seems aimed at youngsters rather than the adult gamer. He feels that the boardgames described aren't his cup of tea. Instead, 'they're just not detailed enough. I want more about complex wargaming, far less about anything that's easy to pick up with an evening's practice.'

(Jim Price)

I must confess that it's the sheer range of available games that appeals to me; I don't much like the diabolical detail. But anything that seems too detailed for my own taste can always go up on our website. Feel free to send me material that suits your own requirements and reflects your own taste.

Another reader has complained that we don't publish enough game diaries nowadays, so I hope that our new one about *Madhouse's The Golden Coast* will be of interest. A *Madhouse* game is always inventive and action-packed.

I've had favourable comments on the covers chosen for the last two issues and on the contributions of our regular columnists, including the articles by our new

writers, Dev Sodagar and MORG. Jonathan Degann's comments about game design have been received with enthusiasm: we're sorry that we don't have one in this issue. Generally, issue #128 (8.1) was preferred to #129 (7.6), but not hugely.

We hope you will all enjoy this issue and send your opinions about it to me.

Feedback Questions for this Issue:

1. Please rate this issue from 1 ('horrible') to 10 ('hugely enjoyable').
2. Which articles / sections did you most enjoy and why?
3. Which bored you and why?
4. How many of you prefer coverage of (a) detailed, complex games or (b) light-hearted coverage of easy games?
5. Do you prefer to read about (a) adventure games, (b) roleplaying games, (c) wargames (d) sports games?
6. How are you on internet games? (a) I'm happy to give them a try, (b) I prefer to play with familiar opponents and allies, (c) Hey it's the way that games are going: let's all keep up with this.

[We aim to publish *Feedback* every two issues. Replies welcomed by mail to the UK office, or by email to: carol@flagshipmagazine.com]

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