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Metagaming Concepts
Box 15346
Austin, Texas 78761
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Good ol' hindsight says GODSFIRE was too much for MGC to try this stage of our growth. Since we didn't know that, we'll award ourselves 500 experience points for only being six weeks late getting it out. In the seven month period ending in January, MGC has published three new games, MONSTERS! METASTAR 80 and OGRE, plus reprinting STELLAR CONQUEST and THE YTHRI with format changes. TSG also went bi-monthly. In terms of time and money, that's looking like going from zero to now in only seven months.

Lurking in the near wings are two more MicroGames and HYMENOPTERA. Yes, HYMENOPTERA will be published as our next big, i.e. $10+, game. More TSG material will be staff acquired and testing of PBM games begun. More different games have been worked on in the past eight weeks than at any time in MGC's brief history. GODSFIRE, METASTAR 80, and HYMENOPTERA have all seen major design work. OGRE, CHITIN, PRE-WHON, and WARPWAD have also seen heavy work. Several major promotional activities are also in the works.

1977 will be our first really big groth year. MGC should stand with secondary publishers like GDW, TSR, and Conflict by year end. The spearheads are MicroGames and TSG. Microgames are risky, as said before, but we think they will go. TSG goes for double to triple circulation with a schedule of gradually increasing improvements.

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EDITORIAL

SPI BADMOUTHING

WAIT! Before anything, let me say this ISN'T one of those all too frequent Simulation Publications Inc. (SPI) putdowns. SPI, the wargaming/simulation industry leader, is frequently subject to speculative attacks by gamers and game publication. Badmouthing SPI seems to be a side effect of SPI's success.

For the record, gaming (as we know it) consisted of Avalon Hill (AH) publishing two similar historical games a year prior to SPI. There was no Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), Game Design Workshop (GDW), Simulation Design Corporation (SDC), Conflicl, MCG etc; just those two new games a year. Then came Dunnigan/Simonsen with Strategy and Tactics (SAT) with a game in every issue. This had to be one of the strangest market ventures of all time. But, SAT reached 32,000 subscribers and modern gaming exploded with new magazines and companies.

Again, for the record, without SPI and their million dollar advertising budget (or estimated to date) we'd still be getting two (A-H) historical games per year. Even A-H profited by the SPI boom. Mail-order buyers pushed A-H store sales to new highs largely because of SPI advertising. None of the smaller firms, except some magazines, would likely exist without SPI. GDW and Conflict started on a core specialty type market. That specialty market would have been too small without SPI. TSR, SDC and MCG are others who've benefitted from the larger market SPI created.

So, hear this publishers, SPI created our opportunity. Unless, of course, some of us had a few hundred thousand to spend on that.

A popular pastime among hardcore gamers is badmouthing SPI games. When you publish 50+ games a year, you can bet there’s no cost effective help for it. But don’t forget the SAT publishers ratings that quickly spot the goof. SPI gains nothing by pushing a dud. Duds get dropped and replaced by winners.

On average, SPI games are well designed and a solid value buy.

Given the occasional bomb, surprisingly many of SPI's games are superb, by any standard. Gamers would be lucky if all game publishers hit the SPI average or put out even one game a year in the SPI "best" league.

Charles Roberts started board wargaming with A-H. SPI stretched it to unprecedented bounds. Other game publishers will have to design innovative and break new marketing ground to stand with SPI/A-H. Doing as SPI and A-H do means you’re all ways a coat-tails. But, you won’t make gaming reach bigger audiences. TSR has broken new ground with Fantasy gaming. It remains to be seen if TSR drives home their innovation with market know how and steady quality. In my estimate, TSR will make it if they keep improving as they have.

MGC is also trying to break new ground. I’m very much aware that innovation and marketing (selling advertising, etc.) are the key. SPI is a tough act to follow. You have to keep all the apples juggled; expand a firm, cash-flow, design, test, produce, sell, advertise, re-test, etc., etc. You also have to show a profit which are numbered. SPI did it and a lot of others have benefitted.

On a competitive level SPI scares hell out of me. They aren’t as powerful as IBM in computers but SPI has customers and resources to go nearly anywhere faster and better than anyone but A-H. A-H is, unfortunately, a subsidiary of a larger firm which is like having one foot in a bucket of cement. SPI scares me, but I have to respect them. No other company in gaming is as consistently fair and reliable to deal with. I can just see IBM letting competitors advertise to all their customers as SPI does with SAT.

No, SPI isn't perfect, if all you're willing to say is perfection. Maybe all that badmouthing is just gamer envy and ego. Maybe gamers like underdogs, until they succeed. I just fun to gripe and SPI is the biggest target. Just remember that without SPI, we'd have an average chit pile from right now for the next A-H game. Maybe we'll get a reissue of CHANCELLORSVILLE this time guys; oh boy, I can't wait.

Howard Thompson

DESIGNER'S NOTE

TAKE THAT, DICE!!

If it always seems that combat die rolls run against you, we have something in common, aside from, perhaps, live to be alive. One reason Stellar Conquest allows a builder's game is because dice seem to do me in. If three Attack ships show up at my home colony and I've got three Attacks defending I know I'm likely to lose it. SC lets me build and concentrate that 50% to 100% edge I seem to need for victory.

My poor dice luck was a cause of problems in play-testing Ogre. When you are never sure how you're doing on the die rolls it becomes hard to tell when a scenario is fairly balanced. This testing of Ogre led to what now seems an easy, natural idea. It's a gimmick which allows fair play-testing and (incidentally, hah!) leads to the near elimination of imbalanced die rolls.

In fact, the idea is such a 'natural' I suspect it has been discovered a number of times by other gamers. But, who cares? I don't recall seeing it in print anywhere in the last few years, so it should be new to most TSG readers. And, I know how we poor dicers need all the help we can get.

The gimmick is based on a chit draw for combat die rolls. Each player has a separate pile of dice of equal number with one to six on them. For Ogre I made two sets, writing down one thru six seven times for each set on heavy card stock and then cutting them out. Each player then had 12 chits turned face down and mixed up with which to draw for combat results. As each chit was drawn for a combat it was turned face down in a separate discard pile for each player. This way each player will get the same number of hits and the used chits can't be seen to help a player remember how his odds are running. When a player has used up his starting chit pile, he merely mixes up the discards, and starts with them.

No, this doesn't guarantee completely equal die rolls, especially when players don't fully get through a stack at game end. But, you get so close you know play tactics made the big difference in winning. The number of chits used can be varied according to the game, i.e., use the number of likely combats in a game as a guide. Probably you need at least 30 chits, five dice for equivalents, or so for each player so he can't easily remember what he's drawn. I think this chit gimmick will cut our play-testing time in half and we're more sure of what our testing results mean when we've finished. This might also be a neat equalizing idea for tournament play.

So, when your oh-so-lucky-advice opponent begins to crow spring this gimmick on him and tell him to get his chits together. Of course, if you're like me, the chits mean you'll forever lose those "damn dice" as your last, and best excuse for not winning.

Howard Thompson
Qig nukes (that means nuclear) fire. (and game ~I tower” cut a - expensive, tanks type. recent article in 5 & A cyborg like Gottlos un­ of “connir~g 11 was pressing steadily toward the largest unlovely building was the nerve center should have been. The hastily constructed, Combine manufacturing center in the hemisphere. no chances. His command was located in the direction. Even the marsh was watched - even the island and thirty kilometers in every direction. Even the marsh was watched - even the river surface. The air was secure; three laser batteries had been set up, and were regularly checked (and Combine aircraft) and the few missiles that penetrated the jamscreen. And scattered through the twilight, here and there, were the bulky shapes of tanks and ground effect vehicles - the elite 2033rd Armored, almost relaxed as they guarded a spot nothing could attack. Inside the post, too, the mood was relaxed - at one monitoring station, where a young lieutenant watched a computer map of the island. A light was blinking on the river. Orange: something was moving, out in the center of the river. Orange: a boat, perhaps. A second before it passed. After the initial seconds of panic, the command post had settled down. Instead of marder- minding an attack, it was fighting for its own life. Men sat orders into throat mike, eyes on the big screen. The present antitank technology (air attacks, laser- and wire-guided missiles, etc...) have made it too cheap and easy to kill those million-dollar tanks. Tanks will still have their uses: probably not as ultra-heavy, but rather as fast, lightly- armored, cheap vehicles, used to exploit breakthroughs rather than create them. Which pretty much kills the smart tank concept. A cyborg like Gottlos would be incredibly expensive, and could be knocked out by a single tactical nuke; a 200-meter Bolo Mark XXIII would cost even more - and, while it wouldn’t fall to one man, it would be such a big target that it would go out long before it paid for itself. But I still wanted to do a smart-tank game. So I did. But it had to make some kind of sense... so half of OGRE is built around the need to explain why such units would ever be built. The other half is a microgame concept - but more on that later.

Problem number one, of course, is those little laser-guided missiles. If a laser image appeared on the big screen... pitted ground, riverbank... and something else, something rising from the river like the coming tower of an old submarine, but he knew what it really was, he just couldn’t place it... and then it moved. Not straight toward the camera, but almost. The lieutenant saw the “coming tower” cut a wake through the rushing water, bounce once, and begin to rise. A second before the whole shape was visible, he recognized it - but for that second he was frozen. And so thirty men with their minds on other things were suddenly brought to heart-pounding alert, as the lieutenant’s strangulated gape and the huge image on his screen gave the same warning... OGRE!

Every so often you throw logic and reason out the window and do something because you feel like it. regardless of whether it makes any sense. And occasionally, when you’re through, it works. That’s what happened with OGRE.

Like many people, I’m fascinated by tanks. Nice image: all that compact power and invulnerability. SF stories like Colin Kapp’s Gottlos and the Laumer Bolo tales fed that fascination - imagine something tank-strong and human-smart. So one of the things I really wanted to put into a wargame was the intelligent tank.

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orange dot that was the Ogre was two kilometers closer, but green squares were moving out to meet it - the men and machines of the 2033rd.

The general entered at a run. "Get me a picture!" he ordered. The screen flickered; moving dots gave way to an image. The huge machine ground over the landscape, incredibly fast for something so huge and unwieldy. The tower on top rose seven meters high. "A Mark V," said the general. "They really want us, all right. Who had the watch?"

"...I...I did, sir."

"Where's it come from?"

"Sir...I...I got a movement indication from the center of the river. I saw it come up. Nothing before that. I swear it, sir."

The general started to reply, then checked himself. Suddenly, he started to step to the keyboard. The map reappeared - the orange dot was closer - and shrank. They saw the tower had moved from fifty - a hundred - kilometers in the air. The general traced the river course. "Here...and here. Yes. They could have done it."

"Sir?"

"Underwater. It went into the ocean here. Through the delta - up the river and out. Very cheap. I wonder... No, they just outfoxed us. As you were, son."

Granted, present computer technology can't replace a man at anything near his judgment. But that doesn't always have to be true. It is pure mysticism to suggest that the "miraculous" human brain will never be surpassed by electronic circuitry. I won't get into the argument of whether machines can be self-aware, although I think of my Ogres as personalities. I will assert that we someday will be able to build a computer that is faster, smarter, and more competent, at least in non-creative occupations, than a human brain.

Sure, they'll be expensive. But expense isn't as important as cost-effectiveness. If a million-dollar robot can last ten times as long as a man, it's a worthwhile investment, and needs to be protected; on the other, the computer can handle more weapons, so every gun you give it augments its strength effectively.

Twelve minutes since the shooting had started. The Ogre was five kilometers away. Paced by eight missile tanks, it had slipped to the side; three of the tanks were gone, and two others had never gotten in range. But the Ogre had paid; it was moving more slowly now. On the big map, three more green dots were moving out to meet it - the men and machines of the 2033rd.

The Ogre was six kilometers away. On the big map, a ring of green around it showed missile tanks ready to move in; more green dots, visibly moving, were GEVs harassing the general machine they watched, one GEV light went out. Another stopped moving and began to blink plaintively. The Ogre moved toward it.

The other nice thing about computers is that they can do a lot of things at once. I suspect that part of the reason tanks, unlike battleships, never developed multiple-gun versions is that a group of men under cramped, uncomfortable tank-condition crew have a great deal of trouble using one gun well. A robot unit, on the other hand, could handle as many weapons as it was given, with perfect coordination.

Which leads to an interesting conclusion. Everything else being equal, a robot tank might be expected to carry as much armor and weaponry as it could. On the one hand, that computer is an expensive investment, and needs to be protected; on the other, the computer can handle more weapons, so every gun you give it augments its strength effectively.

On the big map, a ring of green indicated the Ogre's movement. The screen dimmed as a nuclear warhead hit the Ogres. The image returned. There was a new crater along one of the armored sides - nothing more.

"Get those guns, Commander. The general's calm. "Mercier's reply was equally mild. "Trying, sir. It ducks." Then jubilation. "Good shot, Fair! You got it. Hit the miserable bug. Get him before he gets close enough to blow a hole in us."

"Good man, Mercier! Who did that? Commander, Fair?... Mercier?... Fair?..."

"This is Kowalski in 319. It got Fair about three times. I can't find Mercier."

On the screen, one heavy tank faced the Ogre. Two GEVs swept in and out. Missile tanks and infantry moved closer - too slowly.

"Here it comes," Kowalski - commander of the last heavy, "You'll have to stone about to get about that... you gadget."

"GOTCHA! Took it out..."

"Static. Then a new voice. It sounded quite human. And amused. "Gotcha..."

Enough. I managed to convince myself that, yes, under certain circumstances, the robotic tank would be a better weapon system. The next question was: what kind of robot tank?

I rejected the cyborg approach of Gellis and Cemetery World. not because I doubt it'll work (I think it would), but because (a) it still leaves a human brain at the controls, and I want something better, and (b) I don't like the ideas.

Keith Laumer's Bolos stories hit closer to the mark for me, in that he was making the same basic assumption: big, invulnerable, intelligent supertanks. But his Bolos are just too darn big.

Admittedly, we won't know until we try. But fooling around with models and sketches and thinking about the cube-square law, I get the idea that the dinosaurian Bolos would have the same trouble that large dinosaurs did. Unnecessary bulk. Consider: an ordinary main battle tank today is maybe 12 meters long. Double that and you increase the bulk eight times. Not only is that already pretty expensive, but it's already big enough to do the job. Sketch a view. Now draw a tank twice as long, twice as wide. See how many tank guns the same size you can give it without crowding..."
Inside, the general's face was gray. He spoke to no one. "Smart. That thing is smart." The scream still echoed in the big room - the scream from the last missile tank commander. Out of the Ogre's path, safe behind a three-meter ravine, looking out at the metal giant - and the thing had changed course, ignoring the howitzers, walking over the gully like it wasn't there, crushing the smaller tank. Two GEVs had died a second later; their speed was their best defense, and the Ogre had outrun them. The side trip had given the howitzers a few more minutes; then they, too, had died.

The screen showed the Ogre grinding on - a shamboling ugly thing to move. "The...treads...shoot at the treads," whispered the general. "Stop that thing." The image changed, and he saw what was left of his force: three GEVs and a handful of infantry.

The Ogre rolled on...

Why name it Ogre? It seemed appropriate. The "monsters" - big, violent, and gruesome - and some of them were pretty smart. When someone whispers "Here comes an Ogre," you can feel the hair rising on the back of your neck...

The Ogre, as we worked it out for this game, has two varieties - the monstrous Mark V and the slightly less fearsome Mark III. The Mark V carries two big guns, six smaller ones, lots of antipersonnel, and a half-dozen missiles. It is about 40 meters long, and moves (in this game) at 45 kph; it's a unit that seems to move on good ground. A Mark III is just as fast, but has less punch.

We're working on specs for the Mark I, II, and VI{~). These may show up in TSG, or in a future game.

And, with luck, there will be other Ogre games. This one seems to play well in the MicroGame format; if the micros go over, I'd like to do another one, working in all the different types. Ogre was a game that may yet another, compatible but separate, exploring the powered-armor concept. Of course, Ogre had better work as a MicroGame; it was designed, from the ground up, to fit the format.

The original MicroGame idea was "think small." Something could be played on a legal-sized map, with a total supply of 50-100 counters, that could be learned in an hour or so and could take about the same time to play. Now, as I said in the beginning, I've been wanting to do a game with realistic vector movement used by the ships. As a game can last for many months (game time), these stationary positions produce a quite unrealistic situation. In three months (real time), Venus moves almost halfway through its orbit around Sol. Terra is a quarter of the way through its orbit around Sol in that same amount of time. But as it stands now, they just stand still. Precise changes would add more to the realism of the game. The end result would make it a more challenging SF game than it is now and possibly the best SF game to be played.

The final group of changes would be to expand the board size so

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Edmunds came crashingly to the other Murphy, the week-end Samurai, bowed low. "Ohio, Geronomo," he hissed.

Edmunds came crashingly to the hydroponics mirror, he bid a silent farewell to Johnson, the hydroponics supervisor, forty now and Black Bear, dog soldier of the Morning Star tribe.

Wrapping his blanket around him, he hefted his lance, still safely in two sections, and let himself out into the hall.

In the elevator he met two more Johnsons - the second blind swipe.

After breakfast and a sketchy news and weather.

The weather, for which he had been waiting, was favorable; the old Indian squinted one eye towards the horizon—which would be just over the sink—and nodded sagely.

Far below, in the living core of the vast truncated cone they called Morning Star; past the hydroponics tanks, the fish ponds, the organic gardens, the compost pits, the wind, holding the lance butt down his cloth's armoured cup, and hung his buffalo horn hard hat on the door while he poured another cup of coffee. The leggings posed a problem. It could be chilly in the hills at this time of year, and the bushes were murder on his shins. On the other hand, leggings slowed you down. Their fringes were always getting caught, and if you let them get wet it was like being tied to the ground.

At his age, he couldn't afford to be any slower. Grunting a bit, he listened, standing to test the feel of the foam inserts. When he was a kid he'd done it the hard way, barefoot, with just a feather in his hair and a knife in his teeth. Now he needed all the help he could get.

It was time to go. Adjusting his fur-covered hard hat in the mirror, he bid a silent farewell to Johnson, the hydroponics supervisor, forty now and Black Bear, dog soldier of the Morning Star tribe.

Johnson felt properly chastened. Murphy had represented his block in the samurai games, had led his team in the Cluster Edged Weapons Meet, and had taken the Morning Star Block Ronin to the last Gameland open-class meet, where they had tackled everything up to the twentieth century. As the sole survivor, Murphy had to work out now with the Tudor Block Team.

Johnson had never competed at a higher level than the regional tribal games, and he knew in his heart that he would never take his lance and tomahawk into twentieth century territory.

Murphy stepped off at his transfer point, and Johnson began to see more and more Indians on the moving strip. There were Tudor Rose Apache from the transfer point, Eastern Gate Iroquois, but no Morning Star Sioux. He was the first of his tribe to reach the hелиport, so he fitted his lance together and squatted against a wall out of the wind, holding the lance butt down to the red and white feathers at the head.

The others came up silently, grunting, practically by the wall. Other groups of weekend Indians huddled in clumps around the field, waiting for stragglers. A few Indians, already filled by, led by a man carrying a highly polished hunting horn slung from a leather baldric. One of the Morning Stars indicated the leader, with his chin. He clicked his tongue against the roof of this mouth, "Tock". The tribe registered deadpan amusement.

It was time to go. "Chief" Sherman, the senior Morning Star, led up the line of lanky-eyed savages to join the others boarding the big yellow helibus marked Anvil Mountain Game Park.

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Then it was time to go. "Chief" Sherman, the senior Morning Star, led up the lanky-eyed savages to join the others boarding the big yellow helibus marked Anvil Mountain Game Park.
The games are the only reason that it works."

The girl looked familiar to Johnson. It seemed that she'd been coming in for a long time, as she had, but she was too young for that. Maybe he was thinking of her mother. They all looked alike any­way.

Then, as the tail of the crowd went through the gate, a ritual joke. "Hey, sweetheart, did you murder your parents?"

The tribe laughed at that one, the adrenalin in their systems driving them. They could see the white of the marks and howls like a pack of wolves scenting blood. A man could legiti­mately be killed in the games, in a duel, or at the euthanasia center, and only for food or fibre. The plants, on the other hand, could be killed only by licensed technicians and only for the destruction of flowers for dec­orative purposes.

Once through the gates, the Morning Star squatted in a circle, scratching and scurrying, while Sherman huddled with the other chiefs around the sand table representing the Game Park. Johnson watched a large black bird fly from under the trees, head down, away from the fork of the creek. "colors of the day," he said. He threw them into the center of the circle. "Colors of the day," he said, and howls, like a wolf, answered. "I'm not the one-handed man," Sherman said. "I'm the one who cuts the cord into short lengths, twisting green and gold to make headbands." "What have they got?" "Red and white feathers." "Good, doesn't show the mess." A couple of snickers. "They defend, we attack. They'll be on the attack. We'll be on the defense."

"Happy days." "Wipe out." "Watch your back." Sherman came trotting back, two balls of plastic cord in his hands. "Colors of the day," he said. "colors of the day," the Morning Star replied, scratching and scurrying. "What have they got?" "Red and white feathers." "Good, doesn't show the mess." A couple of snickers.

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they seemed to feel secure enough to come to their nesting grounds. "Saw that greedy hawk today," said Hamilton. "He's hanging around the main solar collector."

There was no Universal Peace among the birds.

Sundown.

Johnson and Shulman sat in the Ranger Shelter dictating their reports. Long tapes on which was killed, where, when, how, who by. Johnson filled out a form for the recovery of one helmet, horned, simulated buffalo hide, his name and social number engraved on lining, lost in vicinity of the rockpile.

"Very good, sir. The cleanup crew will have it for you when you come in next week. Just pay the girl when you pick it up," said the attendant.

The sun had gone ahead. Right, thank God, with Johnson and Shulman ten, and Wilson made eleven. Six short. The Pine Tree Salish should be so lucky. The followed that idiot Peterson right up to the rockpile, and not many came back. As Johnson and Shulman left the helibus, the amplified beat called them over to Big Circle, where the Tribal Cluster had laid on the fire-water. They filled the Morning Star cup, but with only two of them to pass it back and forth, they didn't refill it. While they had their noses in the battered old loving cup, the loudspeaker kept up a drumbeat of announcements.

"Memorial dance for the fallen Salish. Water games fans-don't miss the pinnace match-long John Silver and Captain Morgan at the Big River. After a hard game do you have trouble getting back to work? Owl's Try Herbal Preparation calms nerves, increases energy, sweetens breath, improves digestion...."  

Shulman started to rehash the game with a couple of survivors from Co-op Youth, so Johnson went home alone. Luckily he ran into Murphy on the moving strip, and they rode along in companionable silence. He wondered if he could persuade Murphy-san to pack in Oriental and go Indian. After all, a man's first loyalty should be to his block, not his game, and a man like Murphy was too valuable to be lost to Morning Star. Tomorrow he'd bring it up, casually.

Lost in such thoughts, he didn't notice the pedicap until Murphy drew his attention to it. Two men in white coveralls were unloading a broken toy soldier in the uniform of Napoleon's Guard. It looked as though Edmunds had caught some grape shot, or musket balls, or cannon ball, or something.

"We'll take him," Murphy said. The man holding the foot of the stretcher appeared to be in charge. "We're supposed to take him right home, and get a receipt."

"He's home now," said Johnson. "What?" in Morning Star. "We're all brothers."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines extrapolation as "the action or method of finding by a calculation based on the known terms of a series other terms outside of them, whether proceeding or following."

Extrapolation is the corner stone of science fiction, the means by which facts are altered, changes are recognized, new stories are produced. Extrapolation is present in scientific stories (what if a new form of energy were discovered? a new type of water-breathing race like? what of their minds? Gods?) or life science stories (what is this sentiment, water-breathing race like? what of their minds? Gods?) or demonstration of the limits of a scientific generation? In fact, extrapolation can be applied to any field of study that has a base of data from which to draw.

However in one field, history, extrapolation reaches a pinnacle. By changing a single fact or incident, by letting a pivotal figure live longer or die earlier, an author can show us our present in a fun-house mirror of crazy-quilt logic. Alternatives, as pure examples of what speculative fiction can achieve. With a carefully extrapolated example of what might-have been in hand, we can view the present in terms free of bias and prejudice that so much accompany our current opinions. Free of what, is we can gain services and insights valuable to our everyday lives and decisions.

The difficulties in writing such a novel are testified to in the small number of volumes available. An alternate world, in it's purest form, depends on our current time period against a single event in reversal. No time machines, no time travellers, but a world that could have been but wasn't, told straight as it would have happened.

The Man in the High Castle by Philip Dick is the most well known example of this type. In an extremely well written novel, Dick postulates a present in which Roosevelt is assassinated in Miami. His heavy influence is lost and when Japan and Germany rise, the United States is in a weak position. We lose WWII and Japan becomes the occupator instead of the occupied. Dick won a Hugo with The Man in the High Castle. It is an excellent novel and an even better yardstick for judging other novels of this type. So why does Vladimir Nabokov tell us of an America in which Russia explores and settles North America first and that with typical Nabokovian trickery, anti-terra, as he calls this new world, views time differently. The hero of the story, Van Veem, has frightful visions of a world like ours. In it he is poor and insignificant, a nobody. Nightmares of our current reality haunt him constantly. Ada is, at best, a difficult novel. Nabokov is a stylist who is better know for Lolita, but he is an obvious admirer of Wells and Verne whom he read as a boy. Tunnel Through the Deeps by Harry Harrison gives us a world in which the battle of Navas de Tolosa was lost by the Christians. Spain and Portugal never come into being. John Cabot discovers North and South America. The United States becomes nothing more than a large dominion of England.

To my mind the best alternate world novels are Pavane by Keith Roberts and The Alteration by Kingsley Amis. In Pavane, Elizabeth is assassinated. In Pavane, England and Papal law rules for the next 500 years. A different England of 1968 is where the novel
begins. Trains and trucks have undergone a strange metamorphosis. Combined, they carry goods about the country, but horselock is still the chief means of travel. Communications are carried out through an elaborate system of semaphore towers that occupy the high areas of England and Europe. Lady Eleanor is the central character of the book. Her keep, seriously burdened by a bad growing season, has its tax rate increased by Rome. With a calculated care in her subjects, she defies the Pope and refuses to pay. War, in which she is victorious, fulfills the destiny of Elizabeth. Rome is numbed by the loss and revolution becomes the normal means of freedom. History begins a slow return to our way of viewing it. The strength of Pavana lies in its rich characterization and detailed background. The realism of its logic seems indisputable.

In the kingdom of Greece, Amis' The Alteration. This recent novel by a long time lover of speculative fiction portrays a world in which there is no Reformation. Martin Luther compromises, accepts the post of Pope and becomes German the First. Again the Catholic Church is in full power. Hubert Anvil, the main character, is a boy soprano of unbelievable skill and talent. He can disappear in the adventures of James Eckert, a graduate student with two hobbies: volleyball and a lady named Angie and one problem - survival on a dragon himself. Which comes in handy when the Powers of Evil make off with Angie ... And Jim somehow left his body behind in a world where magic works, wolves talk, and dragons abound. And Jim somehow left his body behind in the transfer, and wound up as a dragon himself. Which comes in handy when the Powers of Evil make off with Angie ...

I'm not giving anything away. What readers liked best about the computer game pricing was welcome. The three higher priced items were rated virtually identical. The $1 a turn option on C&C rated 6.7, $1.25 rated 5.8, $1.50 rated 6.7, $2 rated 6.6, and $3 rated 6.6. Of course, it's likely that those most interested in the computer PBMs were those who voted. The key factor seemed to be the $1.50 a turn game being more complicated than Stellar Conquest. Thus, there is probably no need to worry. The magazine ratings were interesting. The high TSG rating should probably be deflated by .5 to 1.0 worth to reflect the bias of a readership that already likes TSG in a general way. When the results of play were for each magazine are related to their relative rating there is almost a perfect correlation.
IAGO'S VOW
by
Robert Taylor

Paul Miller watched the men as they entered the room. Each was obviously tired like himself. It had been a rough weekend.

The men deposited their folders and briefcases on the table then gathered around a small tray that held a coffee pot. Slowly they found seats around the massive table where Miller sat.

As the men began sitting down, Miller noticed they had a sameness to them. Only the uniformed man stood out, but like the others he was middle-aged and graying. Yet each man had an intensity about him. Their eyes were alert and intelligent. Despite their fatigue, the men carried themselves and the powers they held very well.

Miller recognized all the men, and wondered idly if any of them knew who he was. Shrugging off that thought, Miller noticed the men had broken into three groups each engaged in its own conversation.

The two Cabinet members, the Secretaries of State and Defense, were quietly debating some point, but Miller couldn’t hear them.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA director, and the National Security Advisor seemed to share the same mood. Each was downcast, and they spoke in heavy tones.

"He should have never let the public know," the CIA director said. "Maybe," the NSA replied, "but it certainly would have been impossible to keep the lid on anything after Australia."

"Do you think he will declare martial law?" the Chairman of the JCS asked.

The NSA shook his head. "Who knows? Kennedy didn’t during the Cuban crisis, and we haven’t reached that point yet."

Miller turned toward the third group. The two leaders of Congress were listening to the Administrator of NASA.

"No, the shuttle won’t go out to 22,000 miles," he said.

"Why not," the Speaker of the House asked. "It doesn’t have enough fuel," the NASA chief replied.

"Can’t you fix it up to carry more fuel?" the Majority Leader of the Senate inquired.

The NASA chief smiled tolerantly. "We are working on something like that Senator, but we’ve only had three weeks to almost redesign an entire spacecraft."
Miller felt sympathy for the NSA's voice in the room. Miller knew the difficulty of explaining and justifying programs and theories to non-scientists, especially politicians.

Shutting out the conversation, Miller turned to the contents of his folder. He began to thumb the half dozen pages of Smith's report with his right hand. "Glad to see you could make it, Paul," a voice said mildly.

Miller looked up and saw the familiar face of Smith, the Science Advisor. "Dr. Smith," Miller said as he smiled and grasped the extended hand.

"When did you get here?" Smith asked sitting down.

"My plane landed two hours ago," Miller said, "then a helicopter brought me here, and I've just been waiting." Smith smiled, "Waiting is a popular pastime in Washington." He paused, "Let's hope we can keep a free press before the President arrives." Miller nodded and went to the tray. While Miller poured for both of them, Smith was discussing his quick trip to Australia. Miller listened intently, and was forming a question when he noticed the President. He was thin and was of medium height and build and seemed to carry the weight of his office well. A woman passed middle age accompanied him. She was scribbling notes as he spoke. Abruptly the President stopped, glanced around the room and gave her a courteous nod. She left closing the door behind her.

All the men seated at the table were now facing the President. Mr. President, the Chairman of the JCS said briskly.

"Be seated, gentlemen," the President responded. He walked to the tray, picked up a cup, and extended it toward Miller.

Miller poured, concentrating on not slopping the drink. The President regarding him with a curious look. Smith spoke up quickly, "Mr. President, this is Dr. Paul Miller, a physicist from California. He heads the Rand think tank on aliens." 

"Yes, Miller. Jim told me about you Sunday before I sent him to Australia. I hope you can offer us some insights into the aliens' behavior." The President's voice was still toneless.

"I'll try, Mr. President." Miller replied evenly.

"Well, let's get started," the President said in a quick breath as he moved to the head of the table. Miller and Smith took their seats. Smith whispered to him, "You have a chance, you know."

"Let's say, make it short and to the point. They respect a scientist's opinion, but they don't want to hear all the things behind it." Miller nodded silently as he watched everyone turn their attention to the President.

"Dr. Paul Miller is with us today at the request of Dr. Smith. Dr. Miller is head of a think tank on the aliens. The President asked. Then he turned to Dr. Smith. "Jim, how were those cities destroyed?" 

"In simple terms, Mr. President," Smith replied, "neutrally. The weapon was a beam of high energy." "A laser," the Speaker of the House asked.

"Smith frowned. "Technically speaking, no, but laser comes as close as anything. This beam was nearly two miles in diameter, and the heat generated from it was over a thousand degrees. Each ship swept its beam over the city it was attacking like you would use a water hose on your lawn. The destruction in Sydney was enormous, and Melbourne and Brisbane literally don't exist anymore." Miller nodded as he listened. "What did the ships look like?" 

Smith seemed to carry the weight of his charge. "This is a very important session. They have some sort of field around their ships that distort radar and light waves. We couldn't get a good photograph either." The President nodded, "It was the best we have been able to get a decent radar image of their ships. Of course, that's why we noticed them to begin with. They have some sort of field around their ships that distort radar and light waves. We couldn't get a good photograph either."

"But when they fired on the Australian cities," the Defense Secretary's voice was excited, "this field ceased, and we were able to get good radar images and photos." "Curious," Smith said quietly. He held up some images told us that the big ship was nearly a thousand feet long and the two smaller ships were about three-hundred feet each. And the President gave him the Chair of the JCS. General Wynn, do we have any defense against the aliens' weapons?" the President asked sharply.

"No, sir," the General replied promptly.

"Can't we develop an effective military action against them?" the President asked with little optimism in his voice.

"The General shook his head. I doubt Miller, the President's aide, added. The Maj ority Leader asked hopefully, "The General shook his head. "I doubt Miller, the President's aide, added. The Majority Leader asked hopefully. "I'm afraid so, Senator," the General responded. "We worked up a couple of options on that possibility, but we have no real idea as to what they would do in that amount of time, they could move or shoot down our misle."

"But we have some sort of field around those ships, probably less." Miller nodded in understanding, but felt a nagging doubt.

"Dr. Miller nodded. I doubt Rogers death ray gun, all we have to do is wait till they land and then we can attrition the hell out of them." 

There was a moment of silence, but the NSA spoke. "Interesting. The situation is very similar to our own military capabilities and we have no trouble stopping a thousand or two thousand missles."

"But when they fired on the Australian cities," the Defense Secretary's voice was excited, "this field ceased, and we were able to get good radar images and photos." "Curious," Smith said quietly. He held up some images these creatures are similar to us in height and build, then there can't be many combat troops on those ships, probably less." Miller nodded in understanding, but felt a nagging doubt.

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There was a moment of silence, but the NSA spoke. "Interesting. The situation is very similar to our own military capabilities and we have no trouble stopping a thousand or two thousand missles."
the ground, and forced us to fight their type of warfare."

"Exactly," the Defense Secretary replied. Miller looked at the President. He was frowning. Miller couldn't tell if it was an expression of concern or impatience.

"Mark, are you suggesting we abandon our cities, and wage a guerrilla war against the aliens?" the President asked.

"Essentially yes, Mr. President," the SOD answered reluctantly. "I feel we have no other choice."

"Mr. President, I disagree," the Director said coldly. "I don't doubt Secretary's figures are correct, but I'm an old navy man, and the way these ships maneuver reminds me of a battle with a cruiser escort. The purpose of these ships may be to soften us up before a larger fleet arrives. And anyway, if they should bother landing. Their Terran ability to fly any spot on the globe seems to dictate the current strategy. They're in control. We can't make them land."

Thank you, Ben," the President said, and again he wrote on the pad.

"Mr. President, I agree," Miller said closely, but he couldn't tell how he was weighing the discussion. "Gentlemen, let's put the military problem aside for a moment, and concentrate on our diplomatic options, Steve."

The Secretary of State looked at the President, then glanced quickly at the rest of the men at the table. "With the aliens, we have no options since they do not respond to our communication attempts." The Secretary spoke in a slow, hesitant manner. "They simply repeat the same message over and over as if they first appeared." His voice suddenly filled with firmness. "But the message does give us an advantage in dealing with other countries. Not in anything it says, but the fact that it was in English and transmitted over the frequency used by our astronauts in the Geminians. The States appear to be something special to the aliens."

"Meaning other nations are waiting to see what we do," the President said.

"Yes, Mr. President," the Secretary replied. "Also, the course of action we will be followed by all the major powers, and without the Australian destruction action becomes imperative."

The Russians and Chinese

"Why Australia?" the NSA asked abruptly. "Australia is a large, empty continent, few people, and only one city."

"Yes, but, Mr. President, the Secretary answered calmly. "It is in their interest to do so." The Secretary swept his hands apart in a broad gesture. "This situation is peculiar, like nuclear war. Nuclear war threatens everyone. They avoid nuclear war because it is in their interest. They act to control the aliens with a common front because it is in everyone's interest to do so. Each nation will have its own self-interest to pursue. So if the overriding cause be that we all inhabit the same planet."

"What if the aliens are to offer us the right to confront the United States?" the Defense Secretary asked bluntly.

"I would strongly recommend we decline such an offer," the Secretary began. "There is no advantage to beating our human adversaries with a non-human ally. I can assure you the Soviets and the Chinese feel the same. I don't doubt that with the aliens aid America could rule the world, but to what end? We would rule the world, but the aliens would rule us."

The Secretary looked directly at the President. "Excuse my lectures, Mr. and Secretary, but I said, with the aliens we have no options; with the rest of the world they will respond favorably with our initiative."

"I confirm what the Secretary said, Mr. President," the CIA director added. "Our intelligence reports they have no wish to take unilateral action. They're waiting for us to take the first step."

The President sighed deeply. He massaged the bridge of his nose. His voice had a weariness to it. "Mr. Miller, any conclusions, any analysis?"

Miller's throat felt dry. He licked his lips and began speaking slowly but firmly. "Mr. President, in the last hour over the Geminians, we only have two things: the aliens' actions and the message they keep repeating. Miller glanced at the President. "It read: relinquish control of your planet to us. Miller looked around the table. "The message is an ultimatum. It only lacks the 'or else' to make it complete. We did not relinquish control, and they acted to drive us along with the destruction of the Australian cities."

"And the aliens will only accept one reply, the President said with finality."

"Yes," Miller nodded. "Yes, and the positioning of their ships over the Australian cities. They don't attack any cities for awhile. They're waiting for a reply, and if they don't get one soon they will destroy Australian cities."

"Miller glanced at the President and notice that everyone was looking at him also. Truman was right; thought Miller, the buck stops here."

"The President was staring at his note pad, searching it for an answer. When he looked up at the men around the table, his eyes had a purpose to his nods."

"Gentlemen, it appears all options are exhausted," the President said heavily. "There are other factors at play beyond the military and diplomatic. The economy froze when the aliens appeared three weeks ago. Now, with the attack on the Australian cities, my economic advisors conclude this nation will collapse financially in one short month. As you know, the savings market is not open to us. Many banks have been forced to close. The people need the guarantee of their money or if it is dominated by aliens. I, therefore, feel we must acquiesce to the aliens and surrender."

"The President's thought lasted half a minute before someone spoke. "Dr. Miller, it was the Speaker of the House, "I believe everyone here supports that decision as the only choice left to us under these conditions. As a member of your loyal opposition, I assure you of my party's support in this action."

"Thank you, John," the President turned to the Senator. "Do you think the American people will understand?"

"Yes, Mr. President, they will. Dying is only worthwhile when one dies for something. To fight would perhaps be noble, but it is certain suicide."

"Mark," the President said to the Defense Secretary, "keep those plans for a guerrilla war ready. We will need them."

With the decision made, Miller noticed the room had relaxed. The pressure was gone, and idle conversations took place. Smith had turned to him, and was speaking in a light tone. "It's not that we're a dignified decision, but it is the correct one. We must give in, and hope that in the future we will be able to avenge ourselves."

"Following so that we can serve our turn upon them," Miller said softly."

"With a smile crossed Smith's face. "It appears you're becoming rather philosophical, Paul, quoting Shakespeare. Othello, I believe."

"Yes," Miller said. "Iago's vow of revenge. He paused, then shrugged. "But I don't feel philosophical, only cold and scared. Very, very scared."

The alien took in the planet below. He enjoyed the richness of the colors drizzled at the beauty of the swirling sphere.

A aide approached, bowed, and extended a thin sheet of plastic. The alien took the sheet and gave a slight nod, and the aide bowed again and left.

The alien looked at the sheet of plastic. It glowed as lettering appeared. The alien read and finished with a grunt.

So the little creatures have surrendered. A wise choice? With their back against science and equipment they could not have fought with any hope of success. His vision turned to the planet once again.

Perhaps I will be rewarded with the senior ship of the planet, he thought. It was a dream of a new, living planet. They should be most generous.

His mouth produced the equivalent of a laugh. The thought nagging in the back of his head began to push itself forward till it occupied his mind. The smile faded.

Something one of his lieutenants had said after returning from the planet's moon. The lieutenant had spoken of the crudeness of the other planet. The creatures must be to trust their lives to such equipment. Yet their surrender
showed them to be cowards, willing to sacrifice everything to live.
Such creatures could have no honor. But, could they be both cowardly and brave? It was a contradiction, and contradictions were unpredictable and too often, surprising.
He stared hard at the planet, and gave a small, slow bow. The victory was his, but the war would be long, and the outcome could be in doubt.

REVIEWS

GAME REVIEW: OUTREACH

by
Lynn Willis

OUTREACH continues the game-universe originated by Redmond Simonsen in STARFORCE, the house relationship showing chiefly in counter design and movement rationale. STARFORCE was narrowly military, operational/tactical in scope, and broadened mainly by the reverence for life embedded in the rules; OUTREACH is a true FSL (future society level) game in which conflict is cultural, economic, etc., and the starfleets and stargates represent masked sentient activity, not merely ranked telesthetes, waiting to cast.

Components: 400 die-cut counters, four identical tables/interaction sheets; one die; one of the super SPI sorter boxes; one cover sheet (allusive, of a teleship bound for the great Andromeda galaxy...as on the STARFORCE cover); the good ship Simonsen, that PSL workhorse and one 22 x 34 3-color schematic map of the known galaxy (as well as guesses, including the galactic core). Each hex is 1200 light years across and 1300 deep (that's right--some two billion cubic light years per hex). Hexes are graded by color in three levels of stellar density. Galactic nucleus hexes inhibit movement; beacon stars and dust clouds vary terrain and movement.

Game Sketch: Sequential movement; random player order each turn; movement enhanced by explorer fleets, starfleets and stargates; branching civilization level, etc.; 2-D movement system by "shifts," not through adjacent hexes; fleets scatter if shifts exceed distance based on fleet type and technical level; stargates produce at one of five levels of development; starfleets can be regular (two convert to one gate), explorers and dreadnoughts. STARFORCE's complexity stemmed from the belief that, if challenged, players should be able to prove the makeup of their forces. In OUTREACH one counter may represent any number and type of fleet and, while it is true that the continual-shift and approximate-conflict rules partially obviate the need for proof, in multiple-contact situations players with double-entry brains will find ample room to pull a fast one. Or two.

That is not a criticism. Cheating well in the company of cheaters becomes the most amusing and gratifying aspect of the multi-player game. The reviewer merely recommends the cheating be subtle and gracious; players who grossly flip-flop explorers and dreadnoughts deserve to roll an F on the Fate schedule.

To my knowledge, the Interaction Matrix/Display is a real innovation in design. It is a small matrix forcing each player to advocate a policy each game turn toward each of the other players--but the policy is modified by the policies of the other players, also advocated independently. Correct judgement is absolutely crucial. This simple matrix erases the normal 2 against 2 pattern of the 4-player game, and the idea is enthusiastically applauded.

OUTREACH is highly playable and widely variable. Counting time in centuries, it is logical, realistic (though necessarily abstract--no character roles here, gang), and evocative. The components are a very high quality. Trad B. Hardy, designer; Redmond Simonsen, physical systems; B. E. Hessel, developer. SPI, $9.00.

Play sequence models the dynamics of expanding populations: Movement, Exploration (hex potential determined), Galactic Interrelation (contact, foreign policy, fleet conflict, stargate reduction); Fate (random socio-cultural results), and Resource Allocation (purchase, conversion, and augmentation of forces).

This may sound complicated, but OUTREACH is mechanically simple. Players complete most phases by simple actions or by one look at a table conveniently at hand. This is a smooth game.

Unfortunately the smoothness is achieved by over-trust. Admonitions pop up regarding the recording of X or Y, but no form for proof. In multiple-contact situations players with double-entry brains will find ample room to pull a fast one. Or two.

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GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES is the fourth and purportedly the last supplement to *Dungeons and Dragons*, the pioneer fantasy role-playing game which needs no introduction. As might be expected from such a "last bow," as it were, this newest supplement is different from all three of the previous ones, in a major way. Indeed, the supplement's own conception is that of a work intended "to set down guidelines that will enable you to incorporate a number of various mythologies into your game/campaign". This is by no means "standard" *D & D* material.

In *GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES* you will find no new character classes, no new methods of resolving extant combat, or no new monsters or magical items. The supplement presents the deities of various cultures of Earth (and elsewhere!) in a form from which they can be easily assimilated into the existing *D & D* game structure. The mythos involved include the ancient Egyptian, the Indian, the Greek (of course), the Celtic, the Norse, the Finnish, the Central American Indian, and the latter two is scanty at best). Also included are creatures (I can't really call them deities) from Howard's Hyborea, and from "Eldric and the Melnibone." I'm no scholar of ancient (! and general!) legends, but it seems to me the authors have given a view of the various mythological concepts which is both panoramic and scrutinously detailed, and as complete as possible within the space limitations imposed (this is also the longest of the supplements at 72 pages). Kuntz and Ward have taken material which has come down to us in a sometimes distorted and almost always nebulous form, and clarified its meaning and context. I doubt if any of the gods, the information seems reasonable. For instance, Bast, the Egyptian cat goddess, has a 40% chance of appearing whenever a member of the cat family is killed and either annihilating the offender or forcing him to serve her. This is absurd when you consider the number of feline monsters in the game, most of which have hellish dispositions.

This supplement's physical quality meets the high standards *TSR* has already set. The cover is in full color and portrays a scene of gods which might have been lifted directly off an Egyptian sarcophagus. The only thing I can complain about is the dearth of artwork. Aside from a full-page picture of Odin, there is very little. This is somewhat understandable due to the nature of the material, but I still wish there could have been more.

This supplement to *Dungeons and Dragons* is available for $5 from *TSR*, and is worth it for the mere pleasure of reading it. For students of ancient legends it's a Type I treasure. It should much liven up any *D & D* campaign in which it is used, although I will create my own gods after all, most *D & D* campaigns are not considered to be on earth. But my creations will be heavily influenced by, and patterned after, the material in this sweeping work.
GAME REVIEW: BUFFALO CASTLE
by Steve Jackson

One of the biggest problems faced by a fantasy gamer is soli­tude. It's really difficult to get into good role-playing by yourself (mea­ning less, of course) when faced with a split personality, i.e., "Some days I'm schizophrenic, but, then again, some days I'm not." Secrecy and suspense of fantasy role-playing. Which means a solitaire game is unsatisfying at best.

Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo has shot down that problem once and for all. BUFFALO CASTLE is the first, and hopefully not the last, solitaire dungeon. How did he do it? Simple. BUFFALO CASTLE is actually a flowchart, done in booklet form. From the moment you enter the castle by one of three doors (shades of Monty Hall) you are faced with decisions. Do you want to sit that troll, talk to him, or run him past? Each decision possibility refers you to a different coded result with which to open the next part of the game, whether and how your character has to fight, and what your next decision possibilities are, i.e.: "You are successful..." etc.

In essence of skunk oil. Your charisma with TUNNELS AND TROLLS (also from Flying Buffalo) will work with BUFFALO CASTLE is well-written, with the wit and imagination that characterizes a really good FRP game. For instance, "You have tripped the "stink" trap. You are squirted with essence of skunk oil. Your charisma is reduced by 5 for the rest of this trip..." or "It is impossible to get to (this number). You have cheated. You are instantly vaporized by the Dungeon Master!"

I can offer only two criticisms of BUFFALO CASTLE. The first is of the production quality. This Flying Buffalo average - that is to say, pretty awful. Mimeographed pages are okay in a $3 book, but a little proofreading would have been in order. A couple of typos are so bad you can't tell what was meant, and the most fiendish trap in the whole book is short-circuited by the inclusion of two 21Bs. (When you get the book, you should immediately turn to page 21 and make a note at the top... when you get to 21B, roll the die. On a roll of 1-3, take the first 21B; on 4-6, take the second one.) The second edition will probably have the bugs out.

My second criticism is a suggestion. The idea is so great that it deserves to be taken further. BUFFALO CASTLE is a fairly simple dungeon, suitable only for exploration by first-level fighters, and then only once per fighter. (All the same, not everyone who goes in will get out.) I hope that Loomis, or somebody, or lots of somebodies, will come up with some complex flowchart dungeons. It could be done. Then you would have something suitable not only for solitaire play but also as a guidebook for a regular expedition, complete with Game Master.

BUFFALO CASTLE is $3 from Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O.Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252. It is ONLY a dungeon; to play, you also need FRP rules. It was designed to work with TUNNELS AND TROLLS (also from Flying Buffalo); it will work with MONSTERS! MONSTERS! (Metagaming), with just a little adaptation, it could also be adapted to DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS (TSR), but would need a little more work, since the D&D system is different.

If you're into role-playing, you'll enjoy BUFFALO CASTLE. If you're into solo role-playing, buy it.

REVIEW OF TRIPLANETARY VARIANT V/2
by Kelly Moorman

This variant does much to add to the economic playing side of this popular SF game. It is an expansion on the suggestions made in the first edition, and it incorporates ideas from the galactic Traveller sheet of the Triplanetary rules. Some very interesting ideas have been adopted, which give the player a wide choice of ways to accumulate KiloCredits (KCs). He can do a combination of many things, one of which is establish a passenger line, for which the prospectors must begin prospecting immediately in order in start building up economic empires. Several new types of ships have been introduced, a large ship which tells you what happened, and then again, some days I'm not..."

The players may combine corpora­tions if caught; or they may buy his own ore processor if he wishes.

The players must each form a corporation when a certain amount of wealth is achieved, which costs KCs, naturally. These corporations must have offices on different worlds to operate for them. They must pay annual income taxes to the Patrol, in addition to taxes paid each time a ship is built, for the protection the Patrol offers. The corporations may combine corpora­tions if they want; or they may engage in Piracy, risking the loss of their corporations if caught; or when they have enough money, take on the Patrol, become an outlawed Warmonger in complete defiance of the Patrol's authority.

Violations of the law play a part in this variant also. If caught committing any crimes from a list of three classes of crimes, the player may be imprisoned according to the severity of the crime on a table. Of course, whether the player is convicted or not depends on his public relations points. Events of the day and deeds he has accomplished or committed throughout the game. Once again, the die result on the trial table determines whether the player is a successful (or unsuccessful) attempt to bribe the trial judge. If convicted, a player is fined or imprisoned according to the graded table.

One of the more interesting and imaginative ideas put forth in this variant is the existence of a 'Lloyd's of Luna', which serves an obvious function. The game can be concluded any one of several pre­cise methods, and it can last almost indefinitely.

I think you can see there is a lot of freedom of choice, and record-keeping involved, but many SF players seem to enjoy it all in the interests of realism. The level of realism achieved in this variant is remarkable. Turn by turn play is a bit slow, especially after the players build up a bit of wealth and get involved in different activities. Piracy can be attempted at any time by any player, but if caught, he'll lose his corporation. Also, kidnapping of passenger liners, cargo ships, or even other players for ransom plays a part. The book­keeping is the one real drawback, but I recommend this variant to anyone interested in a very real­istic space-economic-tactical game. Anyone wishing to be the J. Paul Getty of the 21st century, buy this one. After all, you're halfway there by just buying this variant, which is a bargain in this hobby at $3.50. Many SF players seem to enjoy it all in the interests of realism. The level of realism achieved in this variant is remarkable. Turn by turn play is a bit slow, especially after the players build up a little wealth and get involved in different activities. Piracy can be attempted at any time by any player, but if caught, he'll lose his corporation. Also, kidnapping of passenger liners, cargo ships, or even other players for ransom plays a part. The book­keeping is the one real drawback, but I recommend this variant to anyone interested in a very real­istic space-economic-tactical game. Anyone wishing to be the J. Paul Getty of the 21st century, buy this one. After all, you're halfway there by just buying this variant, which is a bargain in this hobby at $3.50.
Space warfare may already have begun... with lasers. In the paper last week (and as is most things that have major potential but which are unsuspected) there was a report that one US spy satellite had "gone blind" due to a brilliant flash, centered in its viewing area. The official story was that it had been set off by the flames of an oil fire -- even though a maximum-brightness oil fire would only have 1/1500th of the brightness needed to knock out satellites, and the other satellites surveying the area saw such a fire. But a good-sized laser shot into the camera lens would do the job quite nicely... and very probably did.

The article then went on to discuss the possibilities of "hunter/killer" satellites, definitely projected by both sides and possibly space borne already. Besides laser blindness, such satellites could use two-ballion projectile systems, too; a single bullet can easily render the average modern-day satellite useless. Most unmanned spacecraft are delicate things, and even the slightest error can ruin them -- during the 1960's camc the realization that there are a lot of useless (though still-orbiting) spacecraft up there that could be fixed by a single twist of a screwdriver.

Something like this could make for a viable game, too -- suppose the year is 1985. The American player has a space fleet small but highly sophisticated network of hunter and killer satellites. The Russians will have one or two multiple-Salyut space stations and a larger number of combined function hunter/killers which are less efficient than the American's. There are also a large number of passive satellites, including both spy and neutral types. Each player knows on which side the other's satellites are, and the others may be Russian enemy spies of may be something else entirely (perhaps even Canadian or European ships). The players will be made each turn of all sorts of spacecraft, by all sides. The object is to render the other side's spacecraft fleet ineffective by knocking out hunters and spies, while avoiding the bad results of knocking out neutral satellites such as weather and astronomical satellites or non-participant ones, such as those owned by the Chinese or the French. And the worst thing of all you can do is kill someone. At present, the US has made no formal protest -- against Soviet satellites, nor has Moscow -- but if one life is lost in space, it'll be the international incident of the decade. One major point has been missed. If a gamma-ray or x-ray laser is used, it is potentially more deadly than a heat laser, because when it hits it will penetrate a shield of metal and destroy the electronic components within. X-rays and gamma-rays cause semiconductors (transistors, diodes, and ICS) to lose semiconducting properties, so they could knock out or enemy ship by knocking out their electronic instruments, making control almost impossible. So it may be that the "cutting torch" laser will not be the most important in space warfare. Aiming these should be no problem, since many mechanical devices have position tolerances of + 1 micron. Sources for inspiration for games, I feel Niven/Pournelle's The Mote in God's Eye is a great situation to game. The game could be a strategic game like SC with 1 player the Empire and the Rebels (possibly a solitaire game) or a tactical operational game covering a sector with several Rebels and a single Empire player.

K. Allen Bjorke
Mpls, Mn.

While you're pressing onward with computer-plans, Micro-games, Hymenoptera and such, I think you'd better watch your flanks. SPI is fast moving forward in the SF area, traditionally yours and TSR's territory.

In 1974, SPI released its classic STARFORCE. Then for two years it was dormant in the SF field. Early this year it released SORCEROR, destined to be another classic. Several months later, it comes out with OUTREACH, tentatively rated higher than STARFORCE! Early next year, STAR SOLDIERS will appear, and by the end of the year, BATTLEFLEET MARS will be out. There are many more releases of even more such releases by SPI.

In my opinion, SPI is out to establish a beachhead in the gaming field. The fact that OUTREACH was not designed by Redmond Simmonsen shows that SPI is not afraid to go outside sources for game ideas.

Mike Lazich
Huntington, Wa.

The articles in TSG about laser weapons have been interesting. But one major point has been missed. If a gamma-ray or x-ray laser is used, it is potentially more deadly than a heat laser, because when it hits it will penetrate a shield of metal and destroy the electronic components within. X-rays and gamma-rays cause semiconductors (transistors, diodes, and ICS) to lose semiconducting properties, so they could knock out an opposing ship by knocking out their electronic instruments, making control almost impossible. So it may be that the "cutting torch" laser will not be the most important in space warfare. Aiming these should be no problem, since many mechanical devices have position tolerances of + 1 micron.

Charles R. Bowles seems to be on the right track in suggesting it was wrong (inefficient?) to colonize planets when moons, or space stations, or systems are easier to handle in that you are not up against man's greatest block to a long and productive life, the Gods arrive or be severely, and indiscriminately, punished. There are approximate three truckloads of men sent out one after the other and a fourth truck is armed with a flamethrower, and right off the zizzies with rifles (bolt action type). The zizzies have about three feet long (not counting a poisonous stinger tail unless it strikes a man in the skull, the heart of jugular). Zizzies have a foot wide wingspan and bite with such a grip that it can rip through a high grade of metal, so even if they come in hundreds of thousands of them, the battle goes hand to hand once the zizzies complete their first pass. Men must drive the zizzies away before the Gods arrive or be severely, and indiscriminately, punished. There are approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp). The approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand when they run out of ammunition. Each man has a claw to grasp (as men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp).
To be blunt: I don't like the direction in which The Space Gamer is turning. My primary beef is derived from a notice on page 21 of TSG 8, which says that TSG and MC are not accepting any mail orders from foreign countries. You may have a "good" reason for this, but right now I'd prefer to shoot first and ask questions later.

From the subscription note on page 2 of the same issue, it seems that Canada's not a foreign country, in regard to that notice, no matter: that's SOP. Perhaps it makes bookkeeping easier to exclude overseas gamers from your mailing list; you may have other reasons. eg: When you start your computer-moderated games, foreigners might feel they're playing-by-mail. Whatever your excuse, it's not good enough.

Foreigners are people, too. When TSG first arrived at my home, it was like a breath of fresh air. Previously, I had acquired SF and F games piecemeal, never knowing what kind of quality I was getting because the reviewers didn't understand SF. To tantalize people for a year and then cut them short is cruel; I appeal to your sense of fendom. If you isolate TSG within Canada, I feel it will hurt your reputation immeasurably. (I personally may start a hate campaign, comparing you to the people who cancelled Star Trek, etc.) Please reconsider your position.

The other complaint is your apparent preoccupation with instituting a pbm-computer game series. The basic idea isn't bad, so long as you don't neglect conventional games in the process. I'm not too keen on some of the ideas coming out of the project feedback column. My first reaction was about as follows, "Player rankings? Tournaments? Cash prizes? What kind of glory-seeking clowns do they think we are?" I've just started one of Flying Buffalo's games, and their magazine hinted at some of these phenomena, but I didn't think TSG was into them too. I think the entire recognition/status scene destroys the whole idea of games; the play's the thing. In my club, we don't worry about winning, we're just there to have fun. So long as people are willing to learn a game, we don't care if they're tactical idiots; they'll learn. Prizes and ratings are an ego trip which spoils the game.

One more point: I disagree that computer-moderated games are more demanding, and that computer-opponents are more intelligent or tougher. Perhaps conceptualizing a computer simulation is more difficult for the individual player, but I think a board version of most such games would be easier to play (excepting the paperwork, which is merely tiresome). Try computerizing Strategy I or Tunnels and Trolls sometime. It doesn't work.

Norman S. Howe
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada

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