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THE SPACE GAMER

THE MAGAZINE OF ADVENTURE GAMING

Star Mail: Three Space PBM Reviews



THE HAUNTING OF HARKWOOD:
GENERIC FRP ADVENTURE
TOP SECRET DAMAGE VARIANT
SOLITAIRE SF GAMING
INTERVIEW WITH TSR'S KEVIN BLUME
1982 GAME SURVEY RESULTS
AND 7 PAGES OF REVIEWS

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THE SPACE GAMER

NUMBER 63 — May-June 1983

IN THIS ISSUE

We've got a nice grab-bag issue for you this month: solitaire SF boardgaming, spy RPG, fantasy RPG, PBM featured reviews, survey results, and more. Since next month (as you probably all know by now), *Space Gamer* will be bi-monthly and feature only science fiction gaming material — alternating with its sister publication, *Fantasy Gamer*, which will concentrate on fantasy gaming pieces — we decided to give you as even a mix as possible this time.

Of particular interest to you industry watchers this month will be John Rankin's interview with TSR's Kevin Blume (learn all about conventions, miniatures, GAMA negotiations, bendable toys, and more) and this issue's *Scanner*. (There are times when I wish for a dull month to come along...)

—Aaron Allston

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STAR MAIL:

Three New PBM Space Games

by W.G. Armintrout

Galactic-scale science fiction games seem to do well in play-by-mail. There certainly have been a lot of them, and many are among the best games the PBM field has to offer. The past few months have seen the debuts of three exciting new space games, all different.

In alphabetical order, they are:

Galactic Conflict

From Flying Buffalo, Inc. \$5 set-up fee, \$3.50 per turn. Designed by Charles Gaydos. Moderated by computer. At least two players per game; monthly, biweekly and weekly turn-around times are available. (Weekly is possible only if you can get access to the Source computer network and there's a 50¢ charge per turn.) Game length is random but at least 15 turns. Begun 1982.

Galactic Conflict must be the "ugly duckling" at Flying Buffalo. There has been little advertising for the game. Turn-sheets haven't been printed. No one at FBI seemed enthused when Schubel & Son suggested a comparative review between this game and *Star Venture* (the people at Flying Buffalo carefully explained that *Galactic Conflict* was an "outside" rather than an "in-house" design).

Therefore I didn't expect much when I entered the game. Fortunately, I was surprised — *Galactic Conflict* is one of the best little science fiction games I've seen in a long time.

Each player starts out with a photocopy of a computer-drawn hex-map of the galaxy, and a computer print-out listing his possessions: one homeworld (worth 10 Economy points), 30 Attack Forces, 20 Defense Forces, 10 Probes and 100 Fortifications.

The goal is to have the most points at the end of the game. Civilian Projects produce one victory point per turn for their current owners (and do nothing

else). There are three ways to get them: find them on neutral worlds, build your own, or (of course) steal them from your neighbors.

A player's strength can be measured by the Economy ("econ") points he can muster. These points may be used each turn to build military forces: Probes, one-way ships which provide data on unowned worlds; Fortifications, immobile static defensive units; Defense Forces, mobile defense units; and Attack Forces, mobile but expensive units which both attack and defend. Econ points may also build Civilian Projects or, if left entirely idle, may raise their world's econ value by one.

All units except Fortifications and Civilian Projects may travel from world to world. Forces travel three hexes per turn, and may not change their course en route. There is no way to intercept moving forces, so there is no such thing as a perimeter defense in the game. Units which move to a world owned by another player are captured, unless they are Attack Forces specifically attacking that world.

Combat is simple, but with a twist. The number of Attack Forces is compared to the number of all defending forces. The greatest number wins the battle. All losers are destroyed. But here's the rub: the winner's losses are figured by squaring the number of losing units and dividing by the number of victorious units. Ten Attack Forces would win against six Defense Forces and three Fortifications, but the victor would lose $(6+3)^2/10 = 8$ of his attackers! In short, you need good odds to avoid being whittled away — and the higher the number of enemies you expect, the higher the odds you'll need.

Other details: Econ points may build a one-way, one-turn Gate to any other star. Players may destroy their own Civil-

ian Projects and Econ points to keep them out of enemy hands. Diplomacy, essential to win, is done on 3x5 cards ("diplomatic messages") exchanged between players (who can also trade telephone numbers and addresses for faster communications). Players may also choose any eight-letter label as their player name.

Each turn's instructions are sent to Flying Buffalo in a simple, easily learned code. "M,27,231,A,3" translates as "Move three Attack Forces from world 27 to world 231."

Flying Buffalo then responds with a plain but serviceable print-out listing the player's overall forces, status of each world owned, probed or fought at, and a listing of players met and their current scores.

Galactic Conflict is a homely but elegant game of science fiction conquest. There is a masterful blend of options in production, military campaigning and logistically structuring an empire. I give it my highest recommendation — particularly for those who have never played PBM before. I do wish the price were lower.

Starlord

From Flying Buffalo, Inc. \$5 set-up fee, \$2.50 per turn. Designed by Mike Singleton. Moderated by computer. Up to 50 players per game; turn-around time two weeks. Open-ended game. Begun 1983 in America.

From ugly duckling to Cinderella. *Starlord* is the game, originally run by Mike Singleton in England, which I raved about in TSG 49. Flying Buffalo is now running the game in this country. From the 22-page crystal-clear rulebook to the color computer print-outs, this is obviously the game Flying Buffalo is pushing.

Each player represents a starlord in the days of a dying "empyr." The eventual goal is to capture the Throne Star and become the Emperor, after which you get to play for free and receive a 5' square galactic map printout. Until someone else dethrones you, that is.

The game is built around each player's "Command Ship." Each player receives each turn, a computer-drawn map (not a list!) of all stars within seven astrals of his Command Ship, and detailed information on his forces and worlds within that range. Ships within range of the Command Ship may move and attack, but cannot move further than seven astrals from the Command Ship. If the Command Ship runs out of fuel, none of the little ships may move.

All of this means that the player knows *nothing* beyond seven astrals of his Command Ship! To conquer, he must

Where We're Going

Over the last few years, wargaming (or adventure gaming, or whatever you want to call it) has been increasing in popularity. One welcome side effect has been the increased recognition that the world of science fiction fandom has given to the gaming hobby. Science fiction gaming is now an accepted part of fandom; almost every convention has a couple of game tournaments, and some SF cons are now inviting game designers and publishers as guests.

The science fiction media are responding to this increased interest, as well. An occasional mention of games in a science fiction magazine is nothing new . . . but we have now hit the big time. The two top magazines in the science fiction field — *Analog* and *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* — have started regular coverage of SF games.

Both magazine's columns are written by Dana Lombardy, the designer of *Streets of Stalingrad* and associate publisher of *Game Merchandising* magazine. Incidentally, though both SF magazines are owned by Davis Publications, the two

columns are not "clones" — Dana writes new material for each magazine each month. Sometimes the columns deal with things that any *Space Gamer* reader is likely to know — i.e., an explanation of game conventions — but more often they consist of reviews and commentary that you don't want to miss.

I encourage all of you to pick up both *Analog* and *Asimov's* to take a look at these columns (the rest of the magazines read pretty well, too). And, if you're already a faithful reader, you might want to write to the editors, thanking them for covering games and encouraging them to keep it up.

Autoduel Quarterly

The first issue of *Autoduel Quarterly* went to the printers a few days ago (as I write this, that is). By now, it should certainly have reached subscribers' mailboxes, and probably your local hobby shop, as well. I apologize for the delay. We had originally planned it for late January . . . we changed that to February

to keep it from interfering with the schedules of the other magazines . . . and its actual debut will be late March. Oh well . . . the next issue (Summer, 2033) is scheduled for late May, and should really come out about that time. The 2033 dating? Simple. The *Car Wars* universe is 50 years in our future — so *ADQ* carries a date 50 years ahead of the present one.

Speaking of *Car Wars*, we're about to go into a third printing. The new rulebook will have a number of changes — mostly small ones — to make the game run more smoothly. There will also be (hallelujah!) an index, so that you don't have to buy a new rule set (unless you want to). We'll be collecting the changes to run in *ADQ*. *Ogre* is about to be reprinted, as well, but there will be no changes at all.

A Trip to L-5

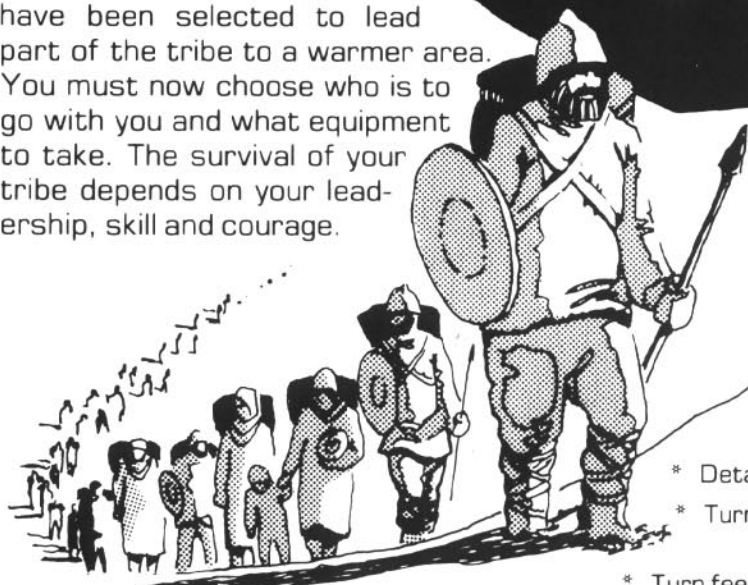
As this issue goes to press, I'll be leaving for the L-5 Space Development Conference in Houston. Some of the topics to be discussed there include Private Enterprise in Space, Military Space Systems, Terraforming, and Interstellar Migration; if it's as interesting as it promises to be, I'll report on it in a future *Where We're Going*.

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