



FLYING BUFFALO QUARTERLY #79

www.flyingbuffalo.com

ISSUE #79

COPYRIGHT © 1999 Flying Buffalo Inc

Printed May 1999

Published by Flying Buffalo Inc, PO Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252. Phone 480-945-6917. Fax 480-994-1170. Single copy \$1.75. Editor Rick Loomis. Frequency: approx 4 times/year. Subscriptions: \$6 for 4 issues. (Overseas airmail subs: \$10/4 issues). Advertising: up to 35 words, \$1. Additional words 5 cents each. Display rates available on request. This magazine contains rule clarifications & changes, strategy articles, player ratings, announcements, & other items of interest to our PBM customers. Articles and cartoons are encouraged, but if you wish a reply you must enclose a SASE. All submissions become the property of Flying Buffalo Inc, and we cannot be responsible for the return of drawings or manuscripts. We will pay \$5 per cartoon or per page of article published. Cartoons must be drawn in black or red ink. Blue ink or pencil will not reproduce and will not be considered. The word STARWEB is a registered trademark of Flying Buffalo Inc. "Illuminati" and the all seeing pyramid are registered trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Inc, and are used with permission.

LOCATION FOUND FOR 1999 FBI CONVENTION!

The 27th Annual FBI convention will be at the Hospitality Suite Resort, 409 N Scottsdale Rd, Scottsdale, AZ 85257 on July 23-25, 1999. Call 800-445-5115 for reservations and mention Group Code FBI-07 for the special rate

SPECIAL ISSUE OF FBQ

I've been wanting to do this for quite some time now: put out an issue of FBQ with no finished games or ratings, just reprints of interesting articles from the past that were printed in issues that are no longer available. We're going to print extra copies of this issue so we can make it available to new players over the next couple years. When I decided to do this, I didn't really intend to print an issue that was 90% written by me, but it turns out that most of the articles I wanted to keep "available" are ones I wrote. Oh, well, it is my magazine after all.

RIFTLORDS MILESTONE

April 16, 1999: The ship Templar Trader in RL-4 turn 222 leads the top ten of the most improved players with a score of 13,323 percent!

STARWEB RATINGS NOW ONLINE

You can now find the complete Starweb ratings online on our webpage at www.flyingbuffalo.com/swrate.htm We will be updating these ratings every time a game finishes. Speaking of Starweb, a player has launched the Starweb Email Discussion Group (SEDG), an informal (and non-official) way to obtain interesting articles and discussion on Starweb. To subscribe to the list, send an email to somnos@compuserve.com. There are back issues viewable at <http://www.accesv.com/~somnos/sedg.htm> We are getting a renewal of interest in Starweb once again: it has been nominated again for the Origins Award for Best PBM Game of the year for 1998, and we just had a full-page ad appear in the back of a Fred Saberhagen BERSERKER novel. Now would be a good time to join a new game. Also, if you have a friend who hasn't tried Starweb yet, how about joining the next PARTNERS Starweb game. This is just a normal game, except everyone joins with a friend, and you and your friend will start near each other. (Each of you still has your own individual score and rating in this game. Other than the start, the game is just like a regular one.)

COVERT OPERATIONS PRIVATE GAMES AVAILABLE

Covert Operations is our newest game (which was also nominated for an Origins Award: best New PBM Game of 1998). Unfortunately it is only available online by email. However if you do have access to email, we can offer you a private game of Covert Operations at a big discount. You can have any number of players (up to about 150), you can have it run as often as you want (daily, several times a week, or once a week), and you can make up your own map (up to about 150 countries.) Look on our webpage for details at www.flyingbuffalo.com/private.htm

LETTER TO THE EDITOR ABOUT COVERT OPERATIONS

I was the 2nd place guy (SPAM Collective) in CO-1. The Merovingian Conspiracy (W Andrew York) and I started working together about turn 3. We were starting to tangle in Europe over Spain, Germany, and France. If this had kept up, we would still be playing now.

I recognized that Andrew had more money to spend than me

Contents

The History of Flying Buffalo and Play By Mail By Rick Loomis	2
Pre-Diplomacy Starweb By John Shannonhouse	6
Why We Designed Riftlords by Rick Loomis	7
WW 1939 Victory Conditions	10
Heroic Fantasy An Article By Rick Loomis	12
The 27th Annual Flying Buffalo Convention	15

from his other holdings and I was getting nowhere fast. So, we negotiated a truce and began to coordinate our "attacks". We were able to capture at least one new country a turn and recapture the countries we lost the previous turn. We did pick on the Hanseatic League since he was giving Andrew the most problems, having the second greatest income at the time. By coordinating spies and super spies, we were able to tell each other what the influence levels were in a number of countries and pick future targets. We did cooperate on a terrorist and influence attack which went well, but significantly damaged the security level (which remained a weak point for the game). When turn 12 rolled around, Andrew let me know that it was time for him to go for the win. We coordinated targets for the last time, and took some more countries.

This game is very different than the one described in the last issue of FBQ. Alliances are very powerful but unfortunately only one can win in a group and the others in the winning side get just a warm and fuzzy feeling. Diplomacy went very far in this game and if players choose NOT to communicate, they will lose very quickly in the face of an organized attack.

I enjoyed this game. Yes, there will be things I will do differently next game. It is a lot like RISK, but playing blind. If I can identify Andrew in the next game, before he gets established, I will try and get him behind ME to win!
Daryl Hokama

LETTER TO THE EDITOR ABOUT STARWEB

Since sometime in mid 1988, Lee and I have been in 18 games together. We first met in L/15 when Lee called me, said he was under heavy attack and asked if I would help him out. I said I would and I did. He managed a 3rd place finish and I came 4th as an Apostle which I thought was a pretty good finish. Lee did precisely what he said he was going to do in that game and I appreciated that since, to that time, almost no one had done the same in my first eight years of STARWEB.

(Continued on pg 14)

Page 1

The History of Play-by-Mail and Flying Buffalo

By Rick Loomis

Reprinted from FBQ#48 (June 1983)

[Anything in this kind of bracket was added in 1999]

I often get requests from reporters, new customers, and others for information on how play-by-mail got started, what it is, and so on. I decided the easiest thing to do would be to write an article for FBQ. Quite a few of our readers have only been with us a little while and don't know anything about our history. And then I can print up extra copies of this issue and give it to people who ask for an interview!

When I first got interested in play-by-mail, the only things going on were the two player games such as chess or pbm *Stalingrad*, and *Diplomacy*. *Diplomacy* was the only multi-player game with a referee that was being regularly moderated, and no one was doing it as a business. It was mostly college students with access to a mimeograph, typing up game moves and fanzines on weekends and after school.

This was back in 1970, long before there was any such thing as a personal computer. I had invented a multi-player game called *Nuclear Destruction* which was a little different from *Diplomacy* in that it had hidden movement. Thus, the moderator had to send different information to each player (for pbm *Diplomacy*, the referee makes a copy of everyone's moves and results and sends the same information to all the players.) I wanted to test my game, so in January of 1970 I started sending postcards to people who I knew might be interested in pbm. I got their names from the pbm ads section in the back of *The General* magazine [published by The Avalon Hill Game Company]. These were people who were interested in two player pbm games, and I figured they would likely be interested in my kind of game.

I was right. I offered to moderate my game for them, in return for just a stamped self-addressed envelope each turn, and I soon had several dozen players. Eventually I changed that to ten cents per turn (this was when postage was 8 cents). I was making an enormous profit of 2 cents per turn processed, and I still remember the twit who sent me an anonymous postcard saying he wasn't going to play my game because I was just "trying to make a profit off of wargamers"! [What does he think The Avalon Hill Game Company and other wargame companies are trying to do?]

At this time I was serving in the US Army with tough duty in Honolulu, Hawaii. All this gaming kept my mailbox full of letters, which was the primary purpose back then. But soon I had over 200 players in my game, and it was becoming difficult to keep up. So I asked my friend Steve MacGregor to write a computer program for me which would run the *Nuclear Destruction* game. We rented time on a Control Data computer which was near the Fort.

This was when the name of the company came about. Most of the game companies, clubs, organizations, or magazines which I knew about either had the word "Simulations" or some kind of German word in their title, representing the interest among adolescent male wargamers in WWII Germany (*Panzerfaust* magazine, International Kriegspiel Society, games called *Kriegspiel*, *Panzerblitz*, and *Blitzkrieg*, etc.) I considered naming my company something like "Simulated Simulations, Inc" or "Kriegblitzpanzerspiel Inc" but instead decided to get something more distinctive. I actually coined the "Flying Buffalo" title as the name of the stamp and coin shop I was going to start when I got out of the army. (From Flying Eagle pennies and Buffalo nickels - Rick's Coin Shop is so boring!) Steve and I started using that name for fun, but soon discovered that it

made us very distinctive. When I went to the computer center to pick up our run for the day, the clerk at the window didn't have to go look us up to see whether it had been done yet. He knew as soon as I mentioned our name whether it was done, and where it was.

Somewhere in here, one of my players asked me if I would mind if he started running a few games of his own. I couldn't see any reason why not, so I told him it was ok. Soon Ed J. was running 5 or 6 games, and he even started up an elaborate "tournament". Unfortunately Ed soon became "busy" and stopped answering letters from his customers. A lot of people complained to me and all I could get out of Ed was that he would "take care of it soon". Eventually I offered to finish all his games for him, but even then I didn't get all of the material from his games (current positions, players' addresses, etc) until I actually drove to San Francisco and picked them up. This took place over a period of a year or two, and at the end of it I was back home in Arizona.

This may seem like a minor event, but it is indicative of a deeper problem. At least two years after this was all over, I received a letter from someone who had read one of my ads for *Nuclear Destruction*, and he asked me "Do you have anything to do with a Mr Ed J from San Francisco? One of my friends sent him \$3 two years ago and never got an answer". He also was advertising a game called *Nuclear Destruction*."

I can see a lot of potential customers getting ripped off by someone else, and then assuming that all pbm companies are the same. Unfortunately, it is very easy to get in over your head in pbm. Anyone with a little imagination can come up with a game (or a description of a game!) that sounds exciting, and anyone with a little money can buy a full color advertisement in some slick magazine. Unfortunately, neither of these characteristics (imagination or money) necessarily has anything to do with whether you have the determination, energy, time, and responsibility to give your customers what they expect and deserve.

It sounds so easy: get a personal computer, write a program to run your game, put an ad in a few magazines, then sit back and let your computer do all the work while you bank a few extra bucks each week. Unfortunately there are so many problems that are not initially apparent: program bugs, equipment breakdowns, answering rules questions, answering complaints, [see the letter to the editor in this issue of FBQ] opening letters, entering moves into the computer, correcting mistakes [both mistakes that YOU made, and mistakes that the customer made], moves that arrive late, moves that have unreadable game numbers or return addresses, keeping track of how much money everyone owes, deciding what to do about someone who hasn't paid the money he owes but is still sending in game turns [here at FBI we "write off" \$2000 to \$4000 a year in accounts of people who were allowed to go 'a little bit' negative, and then ended up quitting without ever paying us], handling bounced checks, and on and on. It is easy for a newcomer to get swamped, and then there is a tendency to put everything off.

There is plenty of room for lots of competition. There are millions of potential customers out there, and no one company is going to satisfy all of them [or even get in touch with all of them]. I just hope that not too many people are put off by the ones who drop out. I have seen at least a hundred people start up some kind of pbm service, and the vast majority of them have quickly disappeared. [At this point the number is more like 500]. Enough editorializing, back to the story.

In 1972 Steve & I got out of the army. We pooled our savings and made a down payment on a \$14,000 computer (for you computer freaks, it had 4K (!!!) of core memory, a teletype

for input and printing, and a high-speed paper tape reader and punch for mass storage.) [Yes, paper tape for storage. Each game was saved on a paper tape, which was rolled up and hung on a nail on the wall. We started this long before there was such thing as a floppy disk drive.] This was a Raytheon 704, which we still use for some of the games (it is a real heavy duty model). WE have since added 24K of memory, a Centronics printer for output, and a CRT for input. But it still uses paper tape for mass storage. [This article was written in 1983. In 1985 when we moved to our current location, we were still using the Raytheon 704 for a few games. Now, however the remains of the faithful 704 computer are sitting in the back yard with weeds growing up through the frame.]

We rented a small three room house in downtown Scottsdale. Steve lived there while I lived with my grandparents. The only income we had other than what Flying Buffalo brought in was the GI-Bill money I was getting for going to school part-time. [I eventually got my bachelors degree in accounting at Arizona State University]. We gradually got bigger and bigger, adding more games, more employees, more equipment, and more space. We moved five times in five years (each time to a bigger location) before we got to our present spot. Right now we have been in this location for just over 2 1/2 years. We have 4000 square feet of space, 21 employees, 5 computers, and over 3000 customers. [When the lease expired at that location two years later, I purchased an old farmhouse in Scottsdale. Now we only have about 2000 square feet of space, and some storage space, but I own the building. I also sold off the retail store part of the company when we moved in 1985, which cut down on the number of employees and space needed. We still have 5 computers, all of which are more modern, and the latest of course has more memory and disk space than all of the old ones combined.]

A lot of things have happened over the years. Some of the ones that stand out in my memory are the couple who met while playing *Battle Plan* and eventually got married; the fellow who wrote and asked to be dropped from all his games, and then called on the phone frantically asking us to ignore his letter since "I decided to get a divorce instead!"; "Iron Man" Lane Marinello (who got his name from playing in 20 games of *Nuclear Destruction* simultaneously) who won a game of ND by telling the other players that he was dying of cancer (he wasn't); having our vice president [David Sleight] commit suicide for reasons unknown; having Avalon Hill refuse to accept one of our advertisements because they thought we were stealing time on some university computer (this was long before it was common for people to own their own computers); [I must be the first person in the world to actually buy a computer specifically to play games with it!] having my grandmother keep asking me when I was going to 'quit playing games and get a job'; having a part break on the teletype that "never breaks" and then finding out that there are no spare parts anywhere in the State of Arizona because "it never breaks" and having to fly a spare part in from Dallas; and meeting my British agent for the first time and finding out that he is also a Methodist, a Conservative, and a Barry Goldwater fan! [That's Chris Harvey - it turns out he is also a Clint Eastwood fan and a Mason. There is a story about why he is the reason I joined the Masons, which you are welcome to ask me if you see me at a convention.]

One of the big goals I have had in mind for FBI (by the way, the acronym was an accident) [but it's so much fun, I got personalized license plates with "FBI"] is to finish, program, and then play "The Game". I designed the first version of "The Game" way back in high school. This is a multi-player, hidden movement wargame which is both tactical and strategic, including production and research. Players move individual divisions

made up of infantry, armor, and artillery; they have three or four different types of aircraft, eight or nine different types of ships including submarines, aircraft carriers and merchant ships; they have factories for various kinds of units; multiple kinds of research; and the map (either squares or hexes - it has been both) is at least 80 x 100. Over the years I have moderated or played in several different versions, but it was always obvious that there was no way this game could be properly played without a computer keeping track of all the paperwork. We still have plans to run this game, and someday we will announce it. I know not everyone is interested in this kind of game, and it will be expensive to play. But boy, will it be fun! [Unfortunately we still haven't had time nor money to program this game. It is MY ideal game, but I realize that only a small minority of game players will have the interest and time to play a game this complicated. So it remains a dream while we continue with the day-to-day work of running a business. If I ever get a few dollars ahead, I will make a serious effort to finish getting this game programmed.]

I think I should point out to all our customers what my philosophy of gaming actually is. It is important that you know what you are getting into. No matter how careful we are, problems will come up. WE cannot please everyone, and not every mistake or error can be corrected to everyone's satisfaction. I believe very strongly in moderator non-interference. One reason why all of our games (except TTT) [TTT was a solitaire role playing game run by hand - don't ask about it - we don't offer it anymore] are completely computer-run is so that there is no way the referee can be biased, either for or against you. You may not like the results, but you have the same chance as any other player.

[A lengthy addition here: elsewhere in the issue was a letter to the editor from a customer who said he received a message from an enemy threatening him by claiming that he (the enemy) was a friend of Rick Loomis, and if the victim didn't do what he wanted, he would make sure that the computer at Flying Buffalo would screw up his turns in the future. It should be obvious on the face of it, but no one who would say such a thing is a friend of mine; and if he was, he would no longer be. No non-employee is allowed access to our computers, and the game data [except for Covert Operations] is not kept on computers that have modems. Some employees do occasionally play in games (for instance I like to play in Anonymous Starweb games and the Anonymous Partners Challenge WWBP game), but they are carefully watched and their game is kept segregated. In the 29 year history of Flying Buffalo, only one employee was ever caught cheating in a game, and he was immediately fired and banned from all games. If an employee ever made this kind of threat he would also be fired immediately. This is only a game to you, but it is my daily bread.]

The only time we run into problems (other than people who refuse to believe that we don't interfere with the results) is in error corrections. Some people knock me when I refuse to change a company policy. Again, this is an attempt to be even-handed. If I can anticipate most of the possible problems, and make a decision about what will be done *before* the problem comes up, I cannot be swayed by who the person is or how persuasive he or she is.

An example is missed turns. We receive something like 200 to 300 turns a day. Some of them are going to be late. If the game has not yet been run when your turn arrives, we will include your turn. We don't like missed turns either; it spoils some of the fun. But if it arrives after the turn has been run, or if it never arrives, you have missed the turn and there is nothing that can be done about it. Once a turn has been run, that's it.

Anyone who has missed the turn, has indeed missed the turn.

There is only once exception. If we later discover that your turn did indeed arrive on time (i.e. on or before the due date) but it failed to get processed due to some error on our part (such as being filed with the wrong game), we will run the turn over again and mail corrected turns to all the players at our expense. We admit that it occasionally happens, and we are not afraid to correct it. But if your turn completely disappears and we have no trace of it, or if it arrives late, you are stuck with the result.

[Actually there is one other exception. If it is a private game, or if every other player in the game agrees to have us run the turn over and include your orders, we will do it. As someone once angrily pointed out - that is not much of an exception; of course his enemy doesn't want us to run the turn over again. And of course that is the point. If we run the turn over again to help you out, we are hurting your enemy, and he is a paying customer too.]

We cannot "do just your builds and loads" just because "my allies will kill me." A player may swear that he mailed his turn eight days before the due date, and it is a vitally important turn. but if we have no record of it, there is just nothing we can do. I may believe you, but do you really want me to believe your enemy when he says he mailed the turn in plenty of time and would I please do his move for him? After he has seen the results of the turn and discovered that you are backstabbing him? And remember, we have over 3000 customers, and they all want their next move processed and mailed as quickly as possible. We cannot afford to wait for you. You have to be responsible for making sure your turn gets here on time. It's not because we don't care. We do care when someone misses the turn, and it makes us very unhappy. But we can not do anything about it. When I first started I tried to wait until all the turns were in. I even phoned people whose turns weren't here. But even when I was only running five games, that didn't work. [When this kind of problem comes up, someone always pipes up with "What about 'The Customer is Always Right?'" "That may work well for a department store or a gas station. But our business is a competition between you and other customers. If your problem is just between you and me, we'll do all we can to help you out. But if fixing your problem means giving a disadvantage to another customer, we can't do it. Remember, some players go to great lengths to make sure they never miss a turn. If we allow other people to go back and make up a missed turn, then we are treating these people unfairly. You can always call us on the due date and ask us whether your turn has been received. If you send your turn by email, we always send a receipt back by return email. And you can sign up for our "Phone Alert" system where we call you if your turn is missing.]

There I go editorializing again. I suppose I should give a description of the people who process your game turns for you. Most of the people who work here are gamers of one kind or another. Joe Formichella stops by the post office on his way to work five days a week and picks up the mail. (I usually pick it up on Saturdays and Sundays; yes your mail is delivered even on holidays). He is the one who opens the envelopes, sorts out the turns, and passes the mail to the various people concerned. [After the move to the current location, Chuck Gaydos picks up the mail every day on his way to work, 7 days a week. However the post office doesn't usually put much (if any) mail in the po box on sundays or holidays anymore. We check, but there's seldom anything there. We do of course receive email and faxes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.]

After the due date has passed, or if all the game turns are in, one of the typists takes the game out and runs it through one of the computers. Wayne West is the day shift, Lee Russell is evenings, and Terry Riseden is night shift. [Wayne and Terry have moved on to other jobs - Lee is still with us. Now the game typists are Lee, Chuck, Jason Sato and Bob LaGrange]

After the game is run, it is passed to the billing computer where we print out your name & address and the little piece of paper that says "you have \$2.50 left in your account". From there it goes to the checking desk where either Lee or Chuck Gaydos checks over the game for obvious errors, billing problems, etc, and inserts standbys if necessary. Chuck is the computer room supervisor.

From checking, the game goes to Allen Nordendale, who sorts out all the papers and stuffs them into the proper envelopes, then runs them through the postage meter. I usually drop them in the mailbox at the main post office when I go home in the evening. [Allen has also gone on to other jobs. Currently the "stuffer" is either Lisa Walker or Charlotte Walker, or occasionally Jimmie Walker. Jimmie is also the "shipping room" person who packs up orders for our card games & role playing games and gets them ready for UPS.]

Steve MacGregor is still the computer programmer. He spends most of his time making little adjustments to the old programs or writing new ones. One of his main projects right now is making a new version of the Starweb program so we can run it on a newer, more portable computer. This will allow us to run Starweb games at various conventions, and do other exciting things that we can't do with the current version (such as Starweb by phone). [Steve no longer works here full time. He has a day job elsewhere, but still makes program corrections evenings. Chuck does most of the programming now. We did get Starweb programmed for IBM Clone computers and now I can run it on a laptop at a convention. And of course now we can send and receive turns for all the games by modem over the internet.]

And we mustn't forget Felicia Radzio. She works in the mailroom, and she is the one who processes all your payments, new game requests, and orders for merchandise. [Felicia has also moved on, and Lee now does most of the mailroom stuff.]

This article is also supposed to be a history of play-by-mail so I should mention some of my competitors (those who are still alive and those who are long gone). I can briefly mention the former customer who got infuriated when I had to post a large price increase on all my games. He dropped out of his games and promised to "destroy" me in "the marketplace" by showing me how a pbm company should really be run. He called his "The Little Company", promised no price increases for the life of the game, a free newsletter to all players, and if any game turn was processed more than three days after the due date, it would be completely free. Within three months I was receiving letters from people who had sent him \$1 for rules and had never heard any response. I don't know of anyone who ever played a turn of his game, although there were supposedly a few.

I suppose the most notorious of the "disappearing pbm companies" was *Lords of Valetia*. This was announced via a flyer and then a full page ad in *Strategy and Tactics* magazine. It was a hand-run, fantasy role-playing game announced just as D&D was getting popular. I understand that he immediately got 1000 players and was swamped. Unfortunately, it was run by one college student, entirely by hand. There was a long delay and then another group announced they had taken it over. They actually ran several turns for many people. (Mike Stackpole says he got five or six turns). Then they ran into trouble also, and a fellow named Elmer Hinton, who called

himself "Gamemasters Publishers Association" offered to take it over. They eagerly handed it over to him, and he published several newsletters and took out many full page ads in magazines like *The Space Gamer* and *The Dragon*. Unfortunately I'm not sure whether anyone actually got any turns from Elmer. He was going to put the whole thing on a computer, and had lots of other grandiose plans that never quite got anywhere. [I believe Elmer "bought" the game from its second set of owners by promising to honor the money owed to current customers, and then chastized those customers for expecting him to keep his promise and give them the turns due them. He didn't realize what he was promising, and it was 'unreasonable' of them to expect him to keep his promise. I don't think Elmer ever intended to defraud anyone, but he certainly had a lot of gall. And if he had spent as much time processing turns as he did explaining to everyone why he wasn't processing any turns, he might have had a decent game.]

Sadly there have been several people who advertised a marvelous game and accepted startup fees so that they could use the money thus received to buy a computer so they could program the game so they could run the turns they had contracted to run when they accepted the money in the first place. But there are other companies out there who seem to be doing a decent job. One of the earlier ones is *Conflict Interaction Associates* (their acronym is deliberate). They have a game called *Pellic Quest*, which is mostly *Starweb* with a few additions (they asked permission and pay me a small royalty.) They seem to have been successful by limiting the size of their operation. They decide how many games they can run and will not accept more customers after the games have been filled.

Another one is called Superior Simulations. This fellow has a very elaborate, very complicated space game called *Empyrean Challenge*. If you play this game, your turn can be a stack of paper half an inch thick! The game is expensive, and I am told that there are a lot of errors in the computer program. One player told me that every time he received a turn, he had to spend a half hour on the phone with the gamemaster, getting all his errors corrected. It sounds like a great game if the guy can just get all the bugs out.

Of course I have to mention *Schubel & Son*. At the moment, they appear to be my biggest competition. I'll start by admitting that several people have told me that their *Tribes of Crane* and *Starmaster* games are a lot of fun. I don't want to sound like a "sour grapes" competitor, but I am going to list some of the things that I consider disadvantages. If you can live with the disadvantages, then you might really enjoy their games.

Most of their games are what is called "computer-assisted". This means that although a computer is keeping track of various details, a human gamemaster actually processes your turn. An advantage of this is that you can do anything you can think of on your turn, something that just isn't possible with a completely computerized game. Unfortunately this also means that the results of your turn are highly dependent on which gamemaster processes your turn THIS time. S&S does not assign you a gamemaster - whenever your turn comes in it is processed by whichever gamemaster is ready for it. This avoids the problem of a gamemaster being slow or getting sick or quitting, but it can create all kinds of headaches for players when different gamemasters interpret various orders differently.

Their games are also more expensive (actually I think a hand-run game has to be). At first glance the turn fees are about the same. But in order to play one of the big games, you have to pay extra for "extra actions". You don't have to do "extra actions" but you'll never get anywhere in the game if you don't.

And each one costs an extra turn fee. I had one fellow explain to me that he spends \$50 a month on his *Starmaster* game (well, that explains how they can afford all that advertising). In addition, if you want to attack anyone, you have to pay extra for a battle turn. That seems reasonable to me. But the person *being attacked* also has to pay extra for a battle turn. That seems unreasonable to me, but apparently they have a lot of customers who are going along with it. This gives rise to the apparently often-used tactic of multiple attacks. The idea is to get several players together to all attack one guy, not to defeat him in battle, but to force him to pay for multiple battle reports (each one is charged separately of course). If it is done properly, he will get tired of paying out all that money and will drop out of the game.

Not all of the S&S games are computer-assisted though. They do have some that are completely computer-run like ours. They have a mark-sense card reader for input. I am somewhat amused by their advertisements that *Catacombs of Chaos* has "easy to read room descriptions in full text with no codes to decipher" (as if the secret of "F10 means Fleet Ten" is difficult to decipher), but at the same time in order to send in your move, you have to decipher a computer card and put pencil marks in the right places. Ah, well.

There are many differences of opinion on what makes a good game or what is a fair price to charge. At least S&S are well established and have been there for several years. If you like their kind of games, you can at least expect to receive game turns on a regular basis.

There is now a lot of competition in the field and a lot of games to choose from. If you don't like what you've seen so far, look around. Just be careful how much money you send anyone in advance. I don't think any of the guys who have disappeared really set out to deliberately cheat anyone. But nevertheless, people sent them money and didn't get it back.

[All of the above companies have, since this was written, gone out of business. Some of their games were bought by other companies and some were not, and some of those other companies have since disappeared also. Please don't ask me about where you can play any of the above mentioned games, as I don't know. Currently our biggest competitor seems to be Midnight Games of California. They have a very popular fantasy role playing game. There is also GSI in Florida who runs a Middle Earth licensed fantasy game, and several smaller companies still around. With the growth of the internet, pbm seems to have shrunk and a lot of companies dropped out of the business in the last 4 or 5 years.]

In July will be the annual Origins convention. This year it will be in Detroit, and I have arranged for a "play-by-mail" booth. Many different pbm companies will have flyers or catalogs available free at that booth. If you can, you might consider going to Origins this year and meeting some of the people involved in pbm. Flying Buffalo will have its own booth too, and I will definitely be there (there is an ad for Origins elsewhere in the issue). I am aware of at least 25 other pbm companies (other than those mentioned above) who have been invited to participate in the the pbm booth. I apologize for not being able to mention them all in this article, and I hope a lot of my readers will visit us all in Detroit.

[This year, and for at least the next few years, Origins will be in Columbus Ohio. Flying Buffalo always has a booth there, and usually there are at least 3 or 4 other pbm companies there also.]

Pre-Diplomacy Starweb
By John Shannonhouse
(reprinted from FBQ#71)

This is not really an article about the “good old days” when Starweb did not allow diplomacy (Yes sonny, I can remember back when there was no diplomacy in Starweb. Not only that, but we had to deliver our turns personally, on foot, hundreds of miles, through 12 foot high snowdrifts, uphill both ways.<g>) Diplomacy is and always was the single most important part of the game. However, the first four or five turns of the game, before you have had the opportunity to learn about the other players, are extremely important. They determine how powerful a force you will be in the game.

Each of the first five turns has its own unique problems and possibilities. The basic strategy is to explore as much as possible, capture all the worlds that are not nailed down, learn about your neighbors to prepare for possible attacks, and still get to full production as rapidly as possible. If your home world is not at or close to full production by turn eight, then you made some serious mistakes in those early turns. It will be hard to recover. I have found that even some experienced players are missing some of the small but crucial steps that give a major advantage in the critical early stages.

Turn 1 looks pretty simple and straightforward, but it is not. The problem is compounded because the example given in the rules results in a relatively poor position by turn 3. The goal at turn one is to prepare for the later turns. You do not want to show up at a world with a 1-ship key on turn 4, unable to keep the key you discovered, and leaving the world you left undefended. The normal startup point is a home world with three connectors, 30 metal, 30 industry, one ISHP and one PSHP. The optimal setup is to build eight ships on three keys, and build the other two up to four ships each. This requires transferring the ISHP and PSHP to keys. Move the three 8 ship keys to the worlds next to the home world. Try to move one of the four ship keys through one of the worlds to another world you do *not* see. Take the other 4 ship key through another connecting world to the *same* alternate world. Example: “F123W137W15 F145W212W15” This is almost certain not to work, but if it does, you have a *major* advantage in the game. Using the same world as the ending spot makes it more than twice as likely to succeed than it would to use two different ending worlds. If it does not work, both ships will still be waiting at the home world, just as if you gave no orders, so this chance costs nothing. If your wild card move succeeded, I will leave you on your own to take advantage of it. You already have more than you deserve.

Turn 2 has two points of interest which are not obvious. First, do *not* leave any ships on the ground to protect any of these worlds. You are going to need all the ships you have on turn 3. No-one will land on those worlds next turn, even if the player next to you *succeeded* in that wild-card extra move on turn 1. Second, pick up all available metal even if you are not moving back to the

home world. On the average, you will pick up one new key on each world, so you will then have an average of 4 ships on each key, 5 if you capture industry. It rarely works out exactly like this, but it is the closest you can get. The two keys moving out from the home world, at 5 ships each, will be the same size as your average key. Move a key to each available new connection. If you have any keys left over, carry the most possible metal back to the home world while still making sure that each key moving to a new location has at least three ships. At this point any key can move to any other open connector by moving through the home world, so your choice of keys is very flexible.

At turn 3 the plan finally comes together. Now is the time to prepare to meet other players. Every new world has a key with at least three ships on it. That means that you can drop a ship to protect the world and still transfer one to the other key to capture it (don't forget to unload any surplus metal first). If you are a merchant, drop one consumer good so that any player crossing over will know that you are a merchant. Move the largest keys possible to all unexplored worlds, and you are ready to meet the other players.

On turn 4 you will usually meet two to four other players. Some will cross over to the world you just left, others will meet you at the new world. You will also be capturing some new worlds. If you capture an undefended world from another player, you might be friendly and return it. An undefended world is a sign of a poorly developed player, so you might make that person the target of any future wars — a good reason to make sure that *your* crossover worlds are all defended.

Etiquette for newly-met players is fairly standard at this point at worlds where you just met. Not following the proper rules is usually regarded as an act of war. If the other player outnumbers you, leave the world to him & do not provide reinforcements. If you have the same number of ships on your keys, it becomes more complex. If you outnumber the other player at more worlds than he does you, let him have an extra “even” world to make up for your advantage. If you are an artifact collector (and no art is on the world) or a merchant, let the other player capture the world as you send a DM pointing out that you are doing this as a token of your good intentions. If there is art, the collector remains there at peace asking the other player to transfer up the art in exchange for the uncontested world. If you met the same player at multiple worlds with equal forces, try & work out which worlds are most valuable to the different players, using the following rules: A “rock” is most valuable to a pirate. A high population/mines world is most valuable to an EB. An industrial world is most valuable to a berserker. A high limit/medium pop world is most valuable to an apostle. Merchants & collectors need worlds primarily for trading purposes. The most valuable for them are high mines worlds for production, especially for the merchant. Split the worlds as evenly as possible, leaving half & reinforcing the other half. Be willing to give up some worlds for good will, but do not let the other player take advantage of you. Unless you're a merchant or collector, it's bad form to move deeper into what you *know* is another player's territory.

A collector or merchant *should* put a key at peace and move into the other player's territory to simplify the process of getting art/hauling metal without the other player using valuable resources and gift orders for that purpose.

Try to determine the player types. A dropped consumer good means you have met a merchant. A plundered world means a pirate. Converts mean an Apostle. A score that is a multiple of 15 implies an artifact collector. A high score means a pirate or empire builder. A medium score means an apostle or pirate. A low score at a multiple of 5 means merchant or berserker. A negative score means a non-collector with "bad" artifacts. At this point you can probably work out two gift orders which will provide maximum advantage to the other player at minimal cost to yourself. Gift a fleet to a merchant or berserker. Gift a "rock" to a pirate for plunder. Gift art (especially bad art) to a collector. This can be risky, but an early gift in conjunction with your friendly DM is very likely to start a good alliance rolling, even before real contact has been made.

You should still have unexplored territory which might not belong to other players. Go ahead and move in. This is your best chance to meet more players. Haul as much metal as possible to your home world. If you met players at neutral worlds, you are now very happy that you loaded metal at every opportunity, because now you can run back to the home world with your load. Do this even if you outnumber the other player. Move a smaller key without metal to the contested world to capture it.

Do not fire at another player at this point unless you are ready for war. Conditional fire orders are fine if you decide to stay at the world.

On turn 5 you should receive your first DM's from other players, and should have met other players. Diplomacy has started, and so this article ends.

WHY WE DESIGNED RIFTLORDS **by Rick Loomis** **(Reprinted from FBQ #71)**

One of my competitors came up with a good idea to introduce beginners to the wonderful world of pbm. They designed a simple, introductory game with short rules that they could give away free at game conventions and insert in magazines, and offered to let beginners join the game for free and play 3 free turns. Presumably this would be enough to get people to try their game out, getting them past the hurdle of sending money to a strange PO Box, and "how does this pbm stuff work anyway?". This apparently worked for them, as I understand it got something like 38,000 people to at least try a turn in the game. (And on this they based their claim that the game is/was the 'most popular pbm game in the world'. One might of course, consider other criteria, such as how many people paid for the game, or how many finished it, or how well they actually liked it. But, everyone has to have something to brag about in their ads.)

One problem I always had with this game is that it was a "Crime" game. Nothing wrong with a game about Crime if that's what you want to play, but it did bug me a bit that 38,000 people's first glimpse of our industry was a game where you sell drugs, beat up little old ladies, and burn down schools for points. The other problem, of course, was that these 38,000 people weren't trying a FLYING BUFFALO game. Naturally I had to do something about this.

We couldn't just pick one of our current games and offer free setups and turns. Most of our games would have a serious problem if there were a lot of dropouts (it spoils the game for the others), and I am told that 80% of the people who tried this other game dropped out without ever actually paying for a turn. Heroic Fantasy isn't really hurt by dropouts, but unfortunately the first 3 or 4 turns of HF can easily be somewhat boring, and if your 3 free turns are boring, why would you pay for more? Obviously I needed to design a game specifically oriented towards getting beginners into PBM. It occurred to me that we might be able to get around the "dropout" problem by designing a short game where we could give away the entire first game for free. Presumably most people would stick around to the end if they didn't have to send any money, and anyone who didn't stick around wasn't a good pbm prospect.

Thinking about what kind of game could be completely finished in 5 or 6 turns, I finally thought of an election campaign. You could have 3 turns for the primary, and 3 turns for the general election. There would only be a few orders per turn, and we could afford to let the beginners play the whole game without charge. So we designed and programmed a nice little "Elect the President" game. (Election Year). Unfortunately it hasn't been particularly popular, and we still get dropouts. After we released this game, I was told by the President of a company that makes an Election Boardgame, that Election games just aren't very popular. They have a little

FBQ BACK ISSUES

After you print 1000 copies of a newsletter, additional copies are so cheap it seems almost criminal not to order a bunch of extras, "just in case" your newest advertising campaign actually works as well as you hope. Naturally this means you end up with stacks of "back issues" available for a long time. If you are a new reader of FBQ, do us both a favor and take some of these off our hands. Any one specific back issue is \$1.75, but if you send us \$10 we will send you an assortment of 10, or send \$15 and we'll send you all that are available when your check arrives. Here is a list of back issues that have articles about specific games:

Starweb= 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 59, 65, 66, 70, 74, 75, 77, 79. Nuclear Destruction= 41, 43, 51, 52, 55, 56, 59, 76 Battle Plan = 41, 56, 58. World Wide Battle Plan = 67,69, 78, 79. Feudal Lords = 49, 69. Galactic Conflict = 60. Mobius I = 60,69, 70. Illuminati = 59,60, 65, 68,70, 74. Nuclear War = 50, 52, 54. Heroic Fantasy = 52, 55, 56, 69, 70, 76, 79 Riftlords = 79. Lizards = 76, 78. Covert Operations = 78, 79

flurry of sales in a Presidential Election year, and not much otherwise.

OK, that didn't work. We need a better subject, and we still haven't solved the dropout problem. How about a trading game? Lots of games are based on buying and selling stuff (Monopoly for instance), and you could have competition without combat. This would have the added benefit of possibly appealing to more women. (A largely untapped market for pbm). Space games are still extremely popular, so we figured we'd put this one in space. OK, you have a ship, with cargo pods, engines, and shields. There are 18 different cargos you can buy and sell. Each planet sells 4 of them and wants 4 others. As you buy and sell cargos, you can spend your profits on buying more engines, cargo bays, etc. We want to have one big huge game that everyone plays in, and we want to allow you to buy as many positions as you care to pay for. But we don't want players to be able to "buy" a victory by having multiple positions, or gang up on beginners. OK, we don't allow you to buy and sell between ships or players. You can only buy or sell to a planet, and its prices are controlled by the computer. Prices go up and down according to the planet's internal rhythm, and how much is bought and sold by the players. How to keep players from manipulating product prices by dumping and buying large quantities? If you cannot buy back what you sell at a planet, it becomes a lot harder. You can lower the price of A by dumping a thousand of them, and you can raise the price of B by buying a thousand of them, but neither will help your buddy who comes in next turn, since you cannot buy A nor sell B at this planet. This also solves the drop out problem. If you drop out, your ship just disappears. You can't give your stuff to another player anyway, and there is no way he can capture it. So it might as well just evaporate.

Some players are going to want combat. OK, so we add laser guns, and pirates. You can't shoot at other players (Why not? The real reason, of course, is that we don't want beginning players wiped out while they are learning the game, and we don't want people who buy 30 positions to be able to gang up on the poor guy who can only afford to pay for one. The game excuse is that the Galactic Union has banned combat in space. Anyone who shoots at anyone other than a pirate, will be declared a pirate and never be able to land at any planet in the Union. Since you'll never be able to make any more money, we'll assume you are rational and won't be shooting at others. The pirates in the game are the real psychopaths who couldn't figure that out.) OK, so you can buy laser guns and shoot at pirates. Won't some beginners get discouraged if they just start to do well and get jumped by pirates? Yes, so we'll tell the players where the pirates might be, and where they absolutely aren't. Thus, you can always avoid them if you choose. (But to make it interesting, we'll make the prices better at worlds with pirates, and offer a bounty for killing them.) (Pirates are run by the computer.)

Players are going to want to have SOME interaction between them, but we still don't want to allow "buying"

the game. Hmm. How about passengers? Some worlds will have passengers who want to go to other worlds. Players are offered a chance to "bid" on the fare. The passenger announces the maximum he is willing to pay to get to Aldebaran, and every ship going to Aldebaran has the option of bidding a lower price. He accepts the lowest price offered, among people actually going to Aldebaran. What else? If two or more players show up at a pirate-infested world at the same time, let them gang up on the pirates. This gives a bit of an advantage to the guy who buys 30 positions, but there's no reason a solo player can't make a deal to tag along with a group hunting pirates. Also the players are going to want to communicate with each other in order to trade information about prices and products at various worlds. We don't really want to pass messages back and forth. This is going to be one huge game with hundreds of players (or hopefully, more). Let's give each ship a "Beacon" that broadcasts a message of up to 73 letters and spaces. Anyone who sees that ship will also see its "message" which can be your phone number or address if you choose.

Now we have a game with 1000 stars, unlimited players, 18 different cargos to buy and sell, plus passengers and ship parts. What else to make it interesting? How about letting some of the cargos be illegal at some worlds? If you sell an illegal cargo, you make more money, but there is a chance you will get "caught" and have to pay a large fine. But then what do we do if a player doesn't have enough money to pay the fine? Suppose we let him spend a turn "prospecting" and give him some free stuff? Yes, and that solves another common problem: when someone misses a turn, it can ruin his game and discourage him from continuing play. Suppose if you miss a turn, you are considered to be "prospecting" and get some free platinum or molybdenum or gold? Or maybe even find a derelict ship or alien artifact? It won't make you as much money as carrying 1000 Longevity Drugs to Sol, but at least the turn wasn't totally wasted.

What's the object of this game? Obviously to make the most money. We can print a "Top Ten" list every turn of the richest players. But someone who starts on turn one is going to be hard to catch up to. If you join the game with 10,000 credits, and see that all the top ten players have over a billion, you aren't likely to expect to get on the list. So let's also include the top ten "most improved over the last ten turns" by percentage. Thus a guy with a billion credits has to earn ten million just to get a one percent increase, but a new player with only 10,000 can earn a mere 1000 to get a 10% increase. Anyone could potentially get on that list. Also we can throw in the top ten pirate killers for the combat minded.

Now we have a game to get people to try pbm. The subject is of general interest. We can offer a couple of free turns, and it won't matter if people drop out. Players can buy as many positions as they like, and it won't hurt the other players. No one will be able to gang up on the beginners, souring them on the game. As a matter of fact, players can do well or poorly, but no one can be eliminated from the game. (Too many pbm games are of the type where you eliminate all the other players one

by one until only the winner is left. That may be fun, but it's heck for the moderator, who has fewer and fewer players to collect turn fees from as the game progresses.) And players can be added to the game at any time. We don't have to wait for the next game to start. (Another killer for beginners.) How do we keep people interested over the long term?

Players are going to want to spend the money they've earned. You've earned ten or twenty million credits, you've been on the top ten "most improved" for a few turns, and you've explored a good chunk of known space, cataloging where each cargo can be found and where the best prices are. What do you spend all that money on?

The obvious thing is to allow players to "buy" planets, or the trading posts thereon. But that would give them a way to exchange money between positions or players. You could start up a bunch of beginning positions, have them buy up valuable cargos and then sell them at your world cheap, thus pumping up your original position by spending money instead of playing well. That gets us away from a game where beginners have the same chances as everyone else. Ah, suppose when you get enough money, we let you spend a million credits buying an "Advanced Navigation Computer". You are now able to move outside the published map and hunt for unknown stars! (You are also removed from the list of "Top Ten Players" and have to compete to be on the list of "Top Ten Advanced Players" so you are no longer competing with the beginners). Now you go outside the map and find a new world. You are allowed to bring colonists there. If you colonize a world, it becomes yours. You are allowed to name it, and it brings you income every turn. And as it grows, you are allowed to spend money building up its Tech level and industry. It starts to buy and sell stuff (you have some influence over what it sells) and you get an override (a tax) on everything it buys and sells. (If we let you set the prices, it allows for too much manipulation of the game, but we can let you tax the world, plus you get to buy stuff here cheaper than anyone else. You get it wholesale!)

Now you are voluntarily outside the space controlled by the Galactic Union. There is no law here, and players are allowed to shoot at each other if they choose. You can be ganged up on, but a player who buys multiple positions has to have each position individually earn a million credits before it is allowed to go into unknown space. And if you want to stay in known space, you can never be attacked. It is completely your option. Of course, players are going to want to take worlds away from each other, so we add troops for offense and defense and spies to find out how many troops are defending a world. Of course we have to have a "Top Ten" list of the biggest Empires (most worlds owned). You can go back into "known space" with your advanced ships, but they can't shoot at anyone in known space, and you can't take control of worlds in known space. You can still earn money there, but now you are competing with the other players for the top ten "Advanced Players" list.

There it is: a game where beginners can join right

in with the advanced players, but can't be taken advantage of or wiped out until they've been in the game long enough to catch on to how its played, and until they voluntarily join the advanced part of the game. What shall we call it? "Rift Lords" has a nice sound to it. Let's have an area on the map where the stars are sparse, call it "The Rift" and make that the area where you might meet pirates. Anyone want to play? The first three turns are free. All we need is the name you want to use for your ship! (Up to 40 characters).

The turn fee is going to be \$4 a turn for your first 3 ships, and \$1 per turn for each additional ship with every sixth ship free. (i.e. 3 ships is \$4 per turn, 4 ships is \$5 per turn, 5 ships is \$6 per turn, and 6 ships is also \$6 per turn.) ('Advanced' players will also pay an extra 25 cents per turn per world owned.) Each ship is a "position" in the game and acts separately. If you want to get in on the first turn of the new game, send in your ship names before January 1st. We are going to start the first "real" game sometime after that. We'll probably have one game with weekly moves, one with two week moves, and one with monthly moves. Rules and setup are free. If you just ask for three ships, you get the first three turns free. If you ask for more than three ships, you get \$12 worth of free turns, and then we start charging you.

If you want more copies of the rules to give away to friends who you think might be interested in joining this game, just let us know how many copies you want. There will be no charge for RIFTLORDS rules.

\$105 for \$100 deal

(a 5% discount for our good customers)

It costs us money to handle/process lots of little checks, and we would prefer that you send us one larger check instead of several little checks. To encourage you to do this, we offer a bonus. If you send us \$100 all at once, we will credit your account with \$105. (Note: this bonus is only if you spend the entire \$105 on products and services by FBI. If you later ask for a refund of part of the \$100, we will deduct the \$5 bonus back out of your account. Also this bonus does not apply if you already owe us \$10 or \$15 when you send us the \$100.)

GET A LITTLE INTEREST IN YOUR ACCOUNT

In these days of low, low interest rates, a 12% return is quite generous. We have some high interest rate debts we'd like to pay off. If you want to loan us \$500 or more at 12% interest (1% a month, paid to your account, or 3% a quarter as a check mailed to you), write or call and ask for Rick. You have to let us keep it for at least a year, and give us at least 90 days notice when you want it back.

FREE GAME TURNS

If you get a friend to sign up for one of our games, and he or she mentions your name or account number when sending us money for the first time, we will give you two free turns in the kind of game he or she signed up for. Remember they have to mention your name when they signup and send money, not just when they ask for a catalog, and not after the game starts.

WW 1939 VICTORY CONDITIONS

(This article is reprinted from FBQ#71. We did make some changes to the starting setups for Balkans and China.)

So far, we have completed 23 games of 1939 WW, and unfortunately the won/loss records are pretty unbalanced. We have calculated a "rating" for each position as in Starweb, where we compare your score to the winners score. (If he won with 4000 points, and you had 3000, your rating is 750). You'll find the 1939 ratings elsewhere in this issue.

Here is a chart showing the number of wins (out of 23 games) for each position, and the average rating.

Position	Wins	Average
Arge/Chile/Spain	0	455
Brazil/Portugal	0	231
Colombia/Cuba/Mexi	1	411
BeNeLux	1	507
The Balkans	9	723
China	5	590
France	0	293
Germany	1	182
Great Britain	1	366
Italy	0	159
Japan	2	343
Russia	2	270
USA	1	512

Actually, it's not too badly unbalanced except for Balkans and China. Without them, everyone is either zero, one, or two. A problem is the number of armies we've given Balkans and China at the start. Both of these countries had huge standing armies at the beginning of WWII, but they were primarily defensive armies. As it is with the current BP program, China (for instance) can take his army across the Pacific and invade the US, which is totally unrealistic. But if we take the armies away, he will be too easy for Japan to wipe out.

I am thinking of making some of the starting provinces owned by China and Balkans "minor countries" controlled by them at the start. Thus those armies could only be used really for defense, and couldn't be used to invade anything more than one space away. The scoring program would be changed from "owns the following spaces" to "owns or controls" various spaces. Any comments any players would like to make about this will be welcome. Of course it is up to us to make the final decision.

Here are some comments by players already received: (remarks in [] by your editor)

The Balkan Position: I believe it would better represent the Balkan's defensive militia through a more liberal use of controlled territories. This best represents the inability of these forces to conduct offensive operations. The Balkan player could begin the game with a strong HPI in these territories representing influence rather than the ability to march against Germany from the outset of hostilities. *[exactly. I will probably do something like this]*

The Italian position: With Switzerland removed from the Italians, this nearly becomes a minor power. Italy's objectives prove quite peculiar in that she must take over as much of the world as possible, yet she begins the game with less than half

the armies of Germany who has the same condition. It also becomes apparent that the lack of an income base limits Italy's ability to sustain any significant operations. *[Any ideas, anyone? I can boost Italy's income base easily. Will making some of the Balkans armies into minor countries help Italy any? Does the Balkan player ever attack Italy?]*

Unrealistic Alliances: Although the nature of historical simulations is to allow for new options, the opportunity for abuse in BattlePlan is great. I believe that more realism could be infused in the game by having an axis or allied victory condition which must be achieved prior to determining individual victors. This would require that the historical alliances at least serve as the basis for the game, although once victory is achieved, alliances could fragment. *[Charles is obviously a "wargamer". Unfortunately wargames do not lend themselves well to pbm. Most historical battles are basically two sides. A two-sided game does NOT work well for commercial pbm. We need to have more than two players to make a financially viable game, and team games in most cases simply do not work. Forcing the Axis and Allies to have totally joint victory conditions would make it a team game.]*

Gifts and Outside Influences: I have borne witness to several instances of players giving away or trading forces to satisfy debts incurred in previous or other ongoing games. This creates an unfair disadvantage to those players choosing to participate in only one game. This abuse has led to disturbing imbalances in games I have witnessed. Anecdotes from players indicate that this is a common practice. Additionally, friends are participating together in games despite your warnings. All indications reveal that this is both a common and accepted practice. *[It is NOT an accepted practice. I agree that satisfying debts incurred in other games is unfair and I try to DIScourage it. However, you pay your money and you should be able to dispose of your game forces as you choose. We have always tried to encourage players to treat each individual game separately. If I am aware of two players who are engaging in practices like this, I will make sure that they never play in the same game again, so they will be unable to finish their "transaction". If you find someone doing it, tell me about it and I'll put a note on their file to separate them in the future! As far as "friends" in the same game, if I know two people are friends I try to separate them as much as possible. But if you join a lot of games, you are going to see some familiar faces. I don't have enough customers to give you 12 brand-new opponents every game. But we do try to vary it as much as we can. I don't understand what he means by "games I have witnessed" since he only played one FBI game.]*

I have come to believe that only the German, Balkan or US player actually stand a chance of victory unless players drop or give their forces to another player. I for one do not wish to pay to participate in such an endeavor. You have the makings for an excellent game system, I recognize that solutions to these issues are difficult. The alternative, however, is a dissatisfied customer base. Charles Grounds.

[Interesting that he thinks the German and USA player have an unfair advantage, given the few wins either of these positions have eked out. He's right about the Balkans though.]

I would like to make note of several situations that have made the game less enjoyable than I had hoped, and have made me decide not to play it again. As I am sure that you no doubt rely on customer feedback *[yes, we do!]* you may want to take some note of them.

First, although you personally insisted to me that you do not allow friends to play together in the same game, it was obvious that I was playing against people who were playing as a team

and who admitted that they lived only a few blocks from each other. This upsets me because the game would have been much more enjoyable to me had I been allowed to play with a friend. Further, the manner in which some countries that lost their player were reassigned, while others were left to be destroyed is just a little suspect.

[? It sounds like these guys were in the same game, but they each played just one game, and they were two different ones. Unfortunately I don't recall the conversation where I 'personally insisted' something to him, but I suspect that one of us misunderstood something the other was asking or saying. We realize that there is a certain type of player who wants to get an unfair advantage in a game by playing two positions, or getting a close friend to sign up and play just to help him out. On the other hand I also realize that some people just want to have someone familiar in the game. If two people want in the same WW game, I allow it if at least one of them is asking for a minor power. I'm not sure why he thinks the "manner in which some countries..were reassigned..(was) suspect", but perhaps I should point out how we assign standbys. First of all, we can't assign a standby just because someone has missed a turn. Many players miss just one turn, and fully intend to keep playing. Unfortunately, some players also quit playing by merely not sending in any more turns. We can't tell the difference between the two until the player has missed a second turn. One player might tell us in advance that he isn't going to play anymore, and we can give his position to a standby player immediately. Another might just quit sending turns, and by the time we realize he has dropped, the position has been rendered worthless to even a standby. Secondly assigning a standby is a very subjective decision. If we think the position is worth playing, or if it seems like it might be important to the players that it be played, we will try to find a standby for it if we have one. (It is possible that we don't have an appropriate standby for some positions.) Please keep in mind that we do not closely follow each game. If you know that an important player in your game is dropping out, and we haven't already announced a standby player, you might mention it to us. That won't guarantee that you'll get a standby, but it will guarantee that we'll look at the situation closer.]

Moreover (and most importantly) the game is nothing like a recreation of a strategic game of World War II. Several factors contribute to this. The unrealistic creation of a Balkan player that is a threat to both Germany and Russia is totally unrealistic. Additionally it is obvious that you have heavily weighted the factors in order to give Germany, America and the Balkans a better chance to win the game. Aside from the Balkans, that is not a bad decision, however why should France, Italy, Russia or Japan be made to pay the same price for a country that is obviously inferior. *[Well, because Russia and Japan have a better chance of winning the game than Germany or America! Interesting that both of these guys think Germany and USA have an unfair advantage, considering that each has won one game out of 23.]* I would suggest modifying your prices to reflect the likelihood of success. *[Actually, I would rather alter the likelihood of success.]* Also, charging 5 dollars (sic) a turn for someone to play a neutral country in this game is nothing short of mail fraud. These countries contribute more to disrupting the game than providing any play variation. *[Don't you think 'mail fraud' is a little strong? No one is given a minor position in 1939 WW unless he asks for it or expresses a willingness to play "any country". Besides in the first 17 or 18 games, Columbia won once and came in 2nd twice; Argentina came in second five times, and BeNeLux has won once and come in second twice.*

] Darin Kinsey

[Darin is a reader of World War II magazine, an historical magazine where we advertise 1939WW. He obviously is more interested in an historical simulation than in a "game" and as I have already said, pbm doesn't really work very well for historical simulations. We've given it our best shot with 1939WW, and I think we have recreated some of the "feel" of the historical situation. But there's no way all the players are going to stick to the historical alliances and decisions. To some of us, that's part of the fun. Anyway, I thought I'd show you what some disgruntled customers don't like about 1939 WW, so those of you who DO like it can tell me whether they're off base, or whether there is something we can fix. Meanwhile, here is a letter from someone who likes the game]

Dear Rick,

I understand that during the past two months you have had some complaints regarding the realism of WW-1939 games, the starting forces, and the victory conditions. I hope you don't mind receiving my two cents worth.

First of all, in regards to realism, I don't believe that each country must follow the same path that they did in WWII in order for the game to be realistic. The 1940's were a dynamic time. Nobody knew for sure who they could trust. Look at the Russian, US, British alliance — it was shaky at best. Furthermore, if Germany had not attacked Russia, would Stalin have fought Hitler? Who knows, but it definitely would not have occurred until much later! The idea that the same alliances must be forged is unrealistic. The political aspect of the 1939 games is what makes each game unique and brings back repeat players.

For example, as the US player I have both allied with Japan and fought Japan. As the Balkans, I defeated Russia and worked with Russia. The same goes for Germany. As Japan, I have conquered the US and worked with them. I try to play each position differently. I am sure that most players do also, that's what makes the game fun - we are rewriting history and changing it to reflect the players personalities.

The starting forces do seem somewhat strange. I do not believe that Japan should be able to single handedly conquer the US. When I play Japan, there is no way that the US could stop my invasion, unless I make a serious mistake. The US starting forces may be correct, but the map is out of context. Perhaps the Pacific should be bigger, and the US should be further subdivided. It's a good thing that Japan did not know that it would be so easy or we would have been driving Hondas a long time ago.

Who were the Balkans? No one person had control over so much power. I think that perhaps you could eliminate that position and either replace it with three minors (each having 400 army) or divide the troops among Germany and Russia. Russia's forces could be stronger in the middle and rear of Russia.

Great Britain is a terrible position. They need a strong hold somewhere. Great Britain's allies can not stop the opposition from taking Australia, India, and Africa. So, The US might as well take Canada for itself because, by the time he can help Great Britain, Britain is usually dead. I was thrown out of Canada both times I played Great Britain.

Changing the victory conditions would dramatically affect the game. Japan only gets points for the West Coast of the US. But, the industry is so enticing that it takes all of it. Once he has it, he's free to finish off China and maybe Russia. It's too easy for Japan to take the US industry then achieve its objectives. On the flip side however, because the US only represents a few hundred points, Japan does not have enough reason to attack

the US. He can trade off those few points in return for an alliance. In the grand scheme of things a few hundred points do not win the game. Politics is the deciding factor as to that battle-not history. China does not have a reason to fight anyone but Japan. Russia, another weak country surrounded by enemies, does not have much reason to fight Germany. Germany only gets 300 points for fighting Great Britain, why do it? Great Britain is not a natural enemy based on victory conditions, and Britain would much rather keep the British isles industry pumping in order to fight in Africa. So, these two hard line enemies of WWII do not have enough reason to fight a war that GB can't possibly win.

In my opinion, the game has evolved into a diverse battle ground because victory is not possible for many players. France, Great Britain, Russia, Germany, Italy, and the US have limited opportunities for victory. Certainly, players can voluntarily surrender points in order to facilitate someone's victory, but that's a different matter. In my games, it appears that victory conditions are of little concern - except some people will agree to wipe out the Balkans, then fight amongst themselves. If you let that position survive for too long, their victory is relatively easy. It seems that the players enjoy working together and attempting to conquer the globe rather than fulfill their victory conditions. It's the death and destruction that they like not the fulfillment of the points.

Strong partnerships are a fact of life in these games. In WW140, there are two brothers playing Mexico and the US. Previously, Nick and Bill were roommates. Alliances are part of the game. Some people like working together, personalities clash, and lasting partnerships and enemies are formed. Your games allow players to develop these relationships. There are just some people that we enjoy fighting. It does not matter who wins, it's the challenge that's entertaining. From a personal standpoint, there are several people whom I like to fight, even if I've worked with them in another game. We just choose to ally due to the situation of that particular game.

Without these special alliances, backstabbing would occur more often. Look at Japan. It needs a pact with China in order to go full force after the US, or it could jeopardize its home islands. However, when the US war is over, so is China- unless their alliance is unusually strong. Likewise, Germany can't fight everyone at once, but it must fight almost everyone at some point in order to achieve its victory conditions. Hitler's mistake was fighting too many people at once. In 1939 games, fighting more than one country at a time is just as foolish. Therefore, people get "backstabbed" or believe that they were backstabbed in every game. In reality though, its just war, and when one battle is over, another will start- or the players should drop. Who wants to send love letters back and forth for the last ten turns- just when you get enough industry to really have some fun. Believe me, there are several players who would love to ally themselves to wipe out the other players, then divide the board and fight each other in an honorable, but all out fashion.

The only way to curb this "backstabbing" dilemma is to shorten the game. Perhaps have 12 turns, but with fewer objectives. After all, most of the fun is in the first half of the game anyway. Furthermore, you can develop three of four different objectives, so that there is variety. One game could have Germany and Russia being neutral, the next has Germany getting 100 points for each Russian space occupied. Establishing scenarios is common in computer war games.

Finally, as much as I like your games, I think that the winners should be decided by percentages, not by total points. If my conditions yield 5000 maximum points and I get 4000, that's 80%. I should only win if no other player achieves more than

80% of their points (whether their maximum is 2000 or 10,000). I have always thought that this would help equalize every player's chances for victory.

Sincerely,
Chris O'Hara

[OK, comments anyone? I am going to make some changes before I start the next 1939 games, so those of you who are lining up to play the Balkans position, be aware that it might not be as easy as before. We do reserve the right to make changes in starting forces and victory conditions any time before your game starts. Of course we won't change them in a particular

HEROIC FANTASY

An Article By Rick Loomis Originally Appearing in FBQ#48 dated June 1983

Heroic Fantasy is turning out to be a very popular game. We have well over 500 people wandering around in the labyrinth. There is a small problem that bothers me, though. We have kept many of the things that might happen in the dungeon a secret, so that you may enjoy the surprise and excitement of finding something new. Unfortunately since any given secret is encountered at a random time, a player may join HF and play for 7 or 8 turns without finding any of the secrets. He may decide that nothing happens in this game, and drop out.

I certainly agree that if all you did was move into a room, attack the monster, take the prize, move to the next room, etc, then it would be a boring game after awhile. But there is more to the game than that, and we are adding more all the time. (We are adding new things to each level, and right now we are working on the 4th level. No customer has yet gone below the 2nd level.) [This was as of 1983]. The first time you attack a Fairy (Constitution of 1) with 20 strength and it takes 13 hits and is still alive, you know there is something more than the rules told you!

I really hate to see a player join HF, play two turns, and then drop out. It doesn't happen terribly often, but it does seem a shame when it does. (It doesn't hurt the game any - when a player drops out his characters become wandering Non-Player Characters. There's another secret you should be aware of - there are NPC's run by the computer.)

I am going to write a little story here, describing the adventures of one of my HF characters in the 2nd level, just to give you an idea of what can happen. The events described here actually happened. (Yes, I play HF and have a ball. although I am aware of most of the secrets of the game, I can still be surprised by the random actions of the monsters and NPCs and by the actions of player characters.) [I haven't played any HF in a couple of years - ever since we finished playtesting level 4 actually].

Machinegun was an enforcer. I had previously had most of my party of characters wiped out by a "friend" who backstabbed me, and I had brought in a rescue party of Machinegun (a male magic user) and Crowbar and Scarface (both Ogre fighters). My enforcers got revenge (that's a story in itself and the battle left over 20 dead bodies on the floor of one room, including 10 fairies which I killed with one fireball.)

But this story is about the later adventures of Machinegun. He had been travelling in the 2nd level with

Scarface, Grumpy (a Dwarf magic-user) and Gina (an Elf magic-user). During their adventures, they had met and cooperated with a group consisting of two humans (Hyzenthlai and Silver), a Dwarf named Bigwig, and a Goblin named Bluebell. Together, the two groups had killed several tough monsters and shared the prizes amicably. The rest of Machinegun's party had just exited, heading for level three. But Machinegun had experience and prizes to total 4460 points. If he could just get one more prize, or kill one more monster, or even just hang around for eight more turns, he would be up to 4500 points and be able to get an additional constitution added before level three.

So, all alone in level two, Machinegun went west from the exit room and found himself in a Storage Room with a Napalm spider. He knew these things were dangerous, as he had participated in a previous kill with his friends and with Bigwig's group. These spiders threw fireballs! But Machinegun was greedy (have I told you that already?) and, shall we say, over optimistic? Perhaps this spider was already wounded, and a single "Blast" spell would kill it? He had a healing potion and an unknown potion; perhaps he could kill it himself and get a LOT of experience points.

Carefully he prepared a blast. The spider seemed to ignore him. Holding his breath, he blasted the spider. Ten hits! But it's not enough! The spider threw a fireball. Or wait a minute - it tried to throw a fireball. For some reason the fireball fizzled! Bigwig and his friends had come into the room! They must have been carrying something that stopped the fireball. Machinegun had anticipated taking 10 hits from a fireball, so he had gulped down the unknown potion, hoping it was a healing potion. It wasn't, but better yet it was a Stygean Potion! Machinegun's constitution was increased 10 points to 40. And Bigwig and the others were here to help kill the spider! There was also a stranger arriving at the same time from the opposite direction as Bigwig's party. He was an Elf named Merlin.

On the following turn, everyone except Merlin attacked the spider. Someone spied on Merlin and he turned out to be a magic-user carrying no prizes. Obviously an NPC. Of course with all this strength the spider was splattered (55 hits) and everyone got 1000 experience points. Upon the death of the spider, a spider skin was left behind. Machinegun knew that this was valuable, but he had already gotten more than he needed with that 1000 points, so he offered to let Bigwig's group have the spider skin. (Besides, another stranger had showed up: Leon, an Ogre. Now there were two strangers in the room, and who knew what they would do.)

So Machinegun went back into the exit room. But more surprises. Bigwig tried to take the spider skin, but Merlin used more strength and took the skin. And Merlin followed Machinegun into the exit room. Bigwig said the heck with it, he was going to take his party and exit level two. Hmmm. So now an NPC Elf magic-user was carrying a valuable magic prize. You never know what an NPC is going to do. He could do something foolish and get himself killed, leaving that lovely spider skin just lying there to be picked up. Besides, Machinegun knew that the extra constitution he had gotten from the unknown potion was only temporary. If he exited now, the extra constitution would just go away. His friends could wait. They were safe, between levels where nothing could happen. So, feeling confident because of his extra CON, Machinegun

decided to follow Merlin.

Machinegun and Merlin could not attack each other in the Exit room (against the dungeon rules!) so Machinegun picked a direction and hoped that Merlin would also go in that direction. The West door was locked, so he went East. Unfortunately Merlin went North. That was no problem. Machinegun came back into the Exit and moved North on a double move. He found Merlin there, attacking another NPC. It was a Dark Room, and there didn't appear to be any monster. This could work out well. He attacked Merlin with 10 strength and also threw a "spy" spell at him. Unfortunately this turn Merlin left the room. Once again, Machinegun followed Merlin to the next room. This room was a Purple Room with a Fairy Queen guarding a bracelet. Merlin was busy killing a wandering Pixie.

This was taking longer than it was supposed to. Machinegun's friends were impatient to begin level three. He decided he was going to need some help, so now Crowbar entered the 2nd level (he had been left behind as a possible rescue party for the future). Unfortunately, he was a long way from the scene of the combat.

Now once again Machinegun attacks Merlin with all of his strength. Again, Merlin leaves, this time taking the bracelet and getting "blasted" by the Fairy Queen. At least this was some progress. Now Merlin had two valuable prizes, and he had certainly taken at least a few hits. He followed Merlin to the West. Meanwhile, Crowbar the Ogre was running to the rescue, two rooms at a time.

More surprises. An Ogre named Squirrel-face killed the Fairy Queen just as we were leaving the room, and a Fairy Ring appeared. Too late to go back and get it. Now Machinegun showed up in a Bright Room, and Merlin was there, trading blows with an Ogre named Undergone! And both of them seemed to be ignoring the Giant Cobra on the other side of the room. Once again displaying confidence in his 40 constitution, Machinegun attacked Merlin with all of his strength. Once again, Merlin tried to leave the room. But this time the Cobra also attacked Merlin. Merlin was finally dead, and the spider skin and bracelet are lying on the floor.

But now for the bad news. Undergone the Ogre attacked Machinegun and gave him 34 hits! So much for the 40 Constitution. Not only that, but two more Ogres showed up: Squirrel-face and a stranger named Ole Olson. What a disaster! Now Machinegun only had 11 strength and 6 CON. If the Cobra or any of the Ogres attacked him with 17 strength or more, bye-bye to our greedy magic-user and 5300 experience points!

Crowbar was still running to the rescue, but it looked like it was going to be too late. Machinegun closed his eyes, held his breath, prayed silently, and drank his last healing potion. So what happened? Praise be - Undergone and Ole Olson left, and Squirrel-face and the Cobra attacked each other! Squirrel-face took 4 hits and also the spider skin. Great. Now instead of an Elf to fight, Machinegun had to stop an Ogre, and instead of 40 CON, he only had 31 CON. He should never have gotten into this. But it was too late to give up now, after investing all this time (and two potions) in the project.

This turn Machinegun was cautious. He spied on Squirrel-face, who grabbed the bracelet and left the room. Of course the Cobra attacked Squirrel-face, but he

anyhow.

By now, Crowbar was getting fairly close. But wait! As he ran through a Dusty Room, a fireball went off behind him, and out of the corner of his eye he saw a Pixie and an Elf die from the damage. Great luck that he wasn't in the room when the fireball went off, but what's that left behind? There was no one left in that room except a Boa Snake, and there were two potions, a coin, a skin of some kind, and a magical pie plate. Five prizes, practically unguarded. Machinegun needed help, but there were five free prizes just lying there! It would take one turn to go back, and five turns to pick up all those prizes! [This was written, and happened, before we added the order to "Grab all the prizes in the room".] What to do? Could Machinegun last another 6 turns without help?

What do you think? Of course Crowbar came to a screeching halt and turned back into the room with all the goodies. Machinegun had gotten along all this time - he could last a little longer.

Meanwhile, Machinegun had followed Squirrel-face south into a Large Room. But Squirrel-face had gone back into the room with the Cobra! Machinegun wearily turned around and followed him back. He had drunk his strength potion, but the temporary strength was already starting to wear off, and he didn't have a chance to attack the Ogre yet. He arrived back in the Cobra's room and found Squirrel-face and the Cobra attacking each other. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to prepare a sleep spell and put Squirrel-face to sleep while he was tangling with the snake. Because of the strength potion, he would still have 9 strength defending himself. While preparing the sleep, he also threw a spy spell at Squirrel-face.

Back in the Dusty Room, Crowbar is still grabbing up prizes as fast as he can.

Another disaster. This time, Squirrel-face attacked Machinegun and gave him 19 hits! That put his CON down to 12. At least the spy spell worked. Squirrel-face's CON was down to 14, and he was carrying 4 prizes worth a total of 500 experience. The Cobra didn't attack anyone, but Ole Oleson (the other Ogre) showed up again. Next turn Machinegun played it safe, and did nothing, giving himself double defense. Squirrel-face and the Cobra attacked each other and sure enough, Ole Oleson tried to attack Machinegun.

Now Crowbar had picked up all but two of the prizes, and he decided that he'd really better go help his friend. He grabbed one of the remaining prizes and started running again.

Machinegun stood very still again, defending himself. The strength potion was wearing off and there were no more potions. This time, but the Cobra and Old Olson attacked Squirrel-face who died, dropping four prizes onto the floor in front of the Cobra.

On the next turn, Ole Olson and the Cobra attacked each other, while Machinegun again was standing very still in a corner. The Cobra killed Ole Olson and two more prizes dropped to the floor!

Now Gobat the Goblin showed up. On the following turn, Gobat tried to take a prize and leave, and the Cobra smashed him into the floor with 28 hits. Machinegun was still cowering in the corner, but now, finally, Crowbar showed up. Crowbar began defending Machinegun while he picked up prizes. Working together, they had over 1000 points worth of prizes between them, and Machinegun had 5400 experience. It ended well after all.

I was pleased to find that we were in L/17 the next year and, (Continued from page One)

when we met, we agreed to work together again. We had three other allies in that game who wound up dropping before the game ended. We had a nice battle with Kevin Frey whom I had gifted my HW to and who stabbed me by keeping all the builds at a certain point. Kevin won the game. I came in 2nd and Lee 4th. The game was notable for one thing. It ended with Lee having 101 keys on the same world. Oh, and Kevin had 629 Industry.

I'm not going to detail every game Lee and I were in together. Of the 18 games, 7 were Long games; 7 were Partner games; 1 was a multi-game; 1 was an E-mail game and 2 were Anonymous games. Lee won 1 of those games: L/21. I won 1 of them: L/24. The rest were won by 15 different players. The only two time winner was Charles Stamos who won both of the Anonymous games. Lee averaged a 6th place finish in the 18 games. I averaged 5th.

In none of those games except the Partner games were Lee and I agreed allies prior to the start of the game. But, whenever I met Lee in a game, we allied because we knew we could trust one another. In none of the games were we a two person alliance. We always allied with others and rarely were those the same people. We both have said and have acted on the plan of trying to ally with new players so as to introduce them to the game with a good experience to start. Also, never have we attacked anyone first and, rarely, have we gone to war with the same people.

Now, given all of the above, I think it's safe to say that Lee and I have never tried to "rule the world." Either that or we are not very good players since we don't have a string of 1, 2 finishes. Since I think even our enemies would agree that we are at least "good" players, it must be that we will not do anything to win. We have, neither of us, ever back-stabbed any other player. When we have given our word to try to do something, we have done our very best to complete that agreement. We have stuck with our alliances to the bitter end in every case even when it was not to our advantage.

I think you should consider running three different levels of STARWEB games. Beginners games would be for players with less than three completed games. Intermediated would be for players with three to fifteen completed games. Old-timers would be for all the rest. You could give the players who sign up the choice of which level they prefer once they know what the level of the competition is likely to be. Beginners should be allowed to play in old-timer game if they choose. Finally, you should at least suggest that all new players purchase the latest issue of the FBQ so they could see who is who in STARWEB.

I don't expect any of this to change your mind about letting Lee and I play in the same games. And I'm not threatening to quit playing STARWEB if you don't change your mind. But you might consider asking the players who are up for the next game if they have reason not to play in the same game with us. I don't think many of them would say they did. Roy Hamilton

Roy,

Thanks for your note. I hope you do understand that I am not, and was not, accusing you and Lee of pregame alliances. The problem is the APPEARANCE of such an alliance. When someone writes me and accuses another pair of such an alliance, I really can do one of about four things.

- (1) I can ignore the complaint (bad customer relations.)
- (2) I can lie to the customer and tell him I'll do something about it, and then ignore it (bad for my Karma, and I'm really a bad liar.)
- (3) I can waste a lot of time trying to "investigate" something that is impossible to prove, and then explain to the complainer that I couldn't "prove" that they were cheating, so I'm not going to do anything about it.
- (4) I can tell the complainer that I'm sorry there's no way to prove such a complaint, but I'll make sure those two are not put in another game together, and thus they won't be able to do it again.

Unfortunately your idea of running three different levels of STARWEB games is not feasible. We don't have enough players to start three levels of games. Instead of being able to start about one game every 4-6 weeks, we'd end up starting one game every 12-18 weeks and who wants to wait 3-4 months for their next game to start?

And I know your suggestion that we ask players before the game starts whether they mind if we put you both in the game is really a rhetorical question, but of course it's also not feasible to ask players who are "up for the next game" any questions. We certainly don't want to get into asking people whether they approve of potential opponents (how does

PHONE ALERT

Name: _____ FBI Account # _____

If I am missing a game turn, FBI may call me at: _____

during the hours _____ or alternatively at: _____

during the hours _____. (Don't forget the area code!)

I understand that Flying Buffalo will attempt to call me **IF** they notice that I am missing the turn. I agree that they will charge me \$10 for making the attempt to call, even if they are unable to reach me. I understand that they will try no more than 3 times to call, and that they will give me no more than six hours to get my turn in after I have been called. I realize that Flying Buffalo is not responsible for my missed turns, even if they fail to call me for whatever reason, and that they may try to call me after 9AM on the day the game is due, or just after the game is due. Phone Alert does not apply to Covert Operations, Illuminati or Riftlords turns. Note that the purpose of this is to allow for those rare cases where a person who "never misses a turn" has his turn lost in the mail or whatever. It is not intended to be an alarm clock to remind you every turn that your turn is due.

Signature: _____

Note: keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have to change the phone numbers or hours, send us a **NEW** form; please don't ask us to change the old one, or just send in a new phone number without referencing Phone Alert. We keep this form in a special place & it may not get changed.

The 27th Annual Flying Buffalo Convention

will be only three days this year: friday, saturday and sunday. Sign up and pay early and take a \$5 discount from the quoted prices. (All tournament fees are refundable if you let us know in advance that you can't make it after all).

When: July 23-25, 1999 starting at 9am Friday and continuing until about 5 PM Sunday.

Where: The Hospitality Suite Resort, 409 N Scottsdale Rd, Scottsdale, AZ 85257. Call 800-445-5115 for reservations, and mention Group Code FBI- 07. \$49 a day plus tax for a Jr King Suite with a king size bed only, or \$59.50 a day for a One Bedroom Suite, which can have a queen or two twin beds, plus a queen pullout sofa bed in the living room (can accomodate up to 4). All suites have stove, microwave, and refrigerator, and the room rate includes a free cooked breakfast every day. Note: this hotel has an airport shuttle too, so ask about it when you call them.

Prices: There is no charge to attend the convention. Each tournament has it's own fee. Starweb: \$99. Heroic Fantasy \$80. Riftlords \$75. Battle Plan \$75. Feudal Lords \$75. Nuclear Destruction \$20. For Heroic Fantasy, we will be running higher level games for people who sign up for the tournament and who bring "graduates" to run in the higher level game for \$10 extra per game. We will "graduate" all characters at the end of these HF games for use in mail games. For Riftlords, you can keep your ships and have them entered in a "real" game after the tournament, along with all their money, engines, etc. We will also be running the traditional Nuclear War card game at the end of the convention, free of charge for anyone who played in any tournament game, or \$5 for others, with prizes for the winner.

Prizes: There will be a plaque for the winner of each tournament, plus a phone card for anyone who plays in two or more tournaments. (But please don't sign up for both Starweb and Battle Plan. It is very difficult to get your turns in on time if you play both of those games & we want to get in as many turns as possible over the weekend.)

Discounts: If you sign up before July 10th, and if you pay with your signup (check or credit card, not deducted from your account) you may take \$5 off any of the above prices (except \$2 for Nuclear Destruction). This is to encourage people to sign up in advance.

Show up on thursday night or stay over Sunday night for the traditional nickle ante poker games with Rick Loomis at the Flying Buffalo Offices.

Yes, sign me up for the 27th annual Flying Buffalo Convention.

Name _____ Account # _____

Address: _____

Credit card # _____

Expiration Date _____ Signature _____

I wish to sign up for the following games: Starweb___ Battle Plan___ Heroic Fantasy___ Riftlords___ Feudal Lords___ Nuclear Destruction___

Send this coupon, or a photocopy, to Flying Buffalo Inc, PO Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252 or sign up on our secure order form on our webpage at www.flyingbuffalo.com

**FLYING BUFFALO INC
PO BOX 1467
SCOTTSDALE AZ 85252**

**BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SCOTTSDALE AZ
PERMIT NO. 10**

**"ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED"**

ADS FROM SUBSCRIBERS

Up to 35 words for \$1. Over 35 words, 10 cents per additional word. Payment with ad, or deduct from your account (we will not "bill" you for an ad). Name & address count as two words total. No commercial pbm ads please.

Put back some of the blood you spilled. Donate blood to the Red Cross. It feels great! (800) 272-0024. --- James W. (The Lord Jim) Milburn (2x)

TFBFM/FBQ back issues wanted. Issues needed: 1, 2, 3, 26, 31, 32, 46, 47, 64. Please contact Robert de Lambert, PO Box 2603, Everett, WA 98203 (206) 286-5789 (msg)

Seeking a partner for Partners Starweb. I suggest a Merchant/Berserker or Merchant/Empire Builder pairing. I'll take either role. John Galt, jdg@rahul.net

COMPUTER PROGRAMS FOR SALE

We provide free ad space in FBQ for programmers who have written programs that will assist a player in any Flying Buffalo game (example: a Starlord map program or one that remembers the gate connections in Starweb). Up to 35 words free. We generally keep running these ads until someone tells us not to. So if you reply to one of them and get no response, please let us know. Also remember that we make no guarantees about anything advertised here unless it comes directly from us. We do not check out these programs.

BATTING AVERAGES PROGRAM FOR BASEBALL OR SOFTBALL. OK, it's not an FBI game, but I asked Steve to write me a program to use in keeping track of the batting averages of my softball team. Works great, easy to use, for IBM only, specify 3" or 5" disk. Only \$30. Want to try it out first? Send \$5 now and \$25 if you like it. Write: Softball Program, c/o Rick Loomis, PO Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252.

THE BUFFALO TALE: Get a "Bard's Tale" adventure made using the Bards Tale Construction Set based on Flying Buffalo's offices & employees. Send \$10 for postage & handling to Flying Buffalo. Ask for "The Buftale".

STARWEB ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: Helps plan and check Starweb moves, keeps records, etc. Now available for Windows, complete with graphical user interface, context-sensitive help file, and more. Older versions for DOS, Macintosh, and Apple II still available. Only \$15 for current Starweb players. Specify computer and disk type to Dick Donald, 1561 Blackhawk Dr, Sunnyvale, CA 94087.

HYPERCARD STARWEB ASSISTANCE STACK: for Apple Macintosh computers. Graphically navigate, record, display & print all web information dynamically. Compose & print diplomatic msgs, more. Send \$25 for stack on 1-800K disk to: Iota, 7713 Shadow Hill, Houston, TX 77072.

Version 2.0 of Star Web Mapping and assistant program. You generate the trial map, and an IBM compatible computer shows you how the map looks. Also, generates a text file of the map, including connections, and fleets that you can run through a word processor to print using

compressed print, or what ever your printer will do. Keeps track of fleets (ships and metals), worlds, artifacts, etc. Will handle E-Mail turns. Turbo Pascal 3.0 source code included. Demo Version with everything except Save \$3.00. Full registered copy \$15.00. Specify disk size needed. John Boyd, 4796 Chamber Ave, La Verne, CA 91750

HEROIC FANTASY Mapmaker: print, screen or store on disk Map of rooms containing name, doors, spells, coordinates, and two comment lines. Also output parameter table, room data table and raw file data table. Five borders including E-Mail and 14 print styles. Widely vary number of rows, columns, and dimensions of rooms. Find rooms by name. Copy, move and erase blocks of rooms. Easily enter and change data. Prints large scale empty grid. Major program. IBM PC; 5.25"; Epson. V1.0 disk and instructions \$8. Basic source code: \$5. James W. (The Lord Jim) Milburn, 1100 East College Ave, Batesville, AK 72501: (501)793-5336. Internet: 74065.1044@compuserve.com

Starweb Analyzer - NT, 95 or 98. GUI interface, Combined players Turnsheets, data search, filter/sort functions, mouse supported color mapping and order editor with prompting/error checking. More info - somnos@compuserve.com or http://www.accessv.com/~wulkan/fmt.html. Price \$40.00 U.S.

Subscribe to the Starweb Email Discussion Group (SEDG). And informal (and unofficial) way to obtain interesting articles and discussion on Starweb if you are online. To subscribe, send an email to somnos@compuserve.com. There are back issues online at http://www.accessv.com/~somnos/sedg.htm