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THE SPACE GAMER

THE MAGAZINE OF ADVENTURE GAMING

USED SHIPS FOR
TRAVELLER

Expert D&D™

"THE DOUBLE-TIMING
DOUBLE-CROSSING
PICK-A-PAST PARADOX"

1980 GAME SURVEY RESULTS

INSIDE STORY!
THE COMPLAINTS
DEPARTMENT

TIME WAR

SELLING YOUR GAME ARTICLE

LORDS OF UNDEREARTH

COMBINATION GAME CONTEST

AND 7 PAGES OF REVIEWS



THE SPACE GAMER

NUMBER 38 — APRIL, 1981

In This Issue

Our lead story is Aaron Allston's review of TSR's new *Expert D&D*. On the whole, he likes it. Find out why on page 18.

This issue ought to be arriving on or about April 1. That's our only excuse for a few of the other things within these pages. It's nice to let off a little steam once in a while!

As promised, we have the survey results this time. Compiling our annual survey becomes a more massive job every year. This year we used a computer, and still almost didn't survive. Special thanks to Elisabeth Barrington, Earl Cooley, and Mark Richmond for designing the program, and to Elisabeth, Denis Loubet, and Chad Irby for hours over the CRT inputting millions of numbers.

Not in this issue (sorry — we lied last time) is the "Conan's Greatest Hits" article. The PRESTAGS variant for Conan's battles doesn't yet live up to its billings.

What do you think of the gold cover? Like? Dislike? Don't care? It's another experiment — if it works, we may do it again once a year or so. Comments?

—SJ

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General status report: The next three sets of Cardboard Heroes are well along. By the time you read this, they ought to be available — see the ad elsewhere in this issue.

CAR WARS is coming along pretty well. We figured out a better way to do the armor rules. Now the big problem is squeezing everything down into the package. This is going to be the equivalent of some peoples' \$6 or \$7 games in a \$3 ziplock.

VAMPIRE (*probable* title unless something strange happens) is taking a back seat at the moment. Too much else to do. Once the CAR WARS typeset draft is ready, I'll look at VAMPIRE.

* * *

As you probably noticed, the cover price this issue is up to \$2.50, but we're back to 40 pages. Inflation forced the price increase, but we can try to make up for it by giving you more pages. (The ads in this issue, by themselves, didn't really justify a 40-pager. Oh, well.) We'll keep trying to get out 40 pages whenever we can. If you want to help, you can buy our advertisers' games . . . and write to them to say you saw their ad in TSG. Advertisers go on results. From everything we can find out, TSG is a good market — but the advertisers like some specific feedback as well.

The subscription price is *not* going up — not right away, anyhow. So a subscription is a better deal, comparatively, than it was. Unless the economy straightens out we'll eventually have to raise subscription price as well . . . but we'll hold off as long as we can, rather than *contribute* to the price spiral before we absolutely have to.

There have been a number of questions about our review-everything policy (one industry magazine called it a "crusade"). A few questions and answers:

Who writes your reviews? Some are written by staff members, the rest by

WHERE WE'RE GOING

readers. While Forrest often assigns reviews to specific people, every month we get a number of unsolicited reviews that also see print. Most "feature" reviews are by assignment, but this is not a hard-and-fast rule either.

How do you insure fairness? We can't — not 100%. If and when we let a really messed-up review get by, we'll run a counter-opinion or a correction, as necessary.

But there are several things we do to *try* to insure fairness. *First*, we will review *any* computer game, SF or fantasy game or supplement, SF/fantasy miniatures line we receive. It doesn't matter

who published it — large or small, advertiser or non-advertiser.

Second, reviews are based on nothing but the product. In some hobbies (not necessarily just gaming), there are magazines that review everything favorably to keep potential advertisers happy. There are others that consistently puff some product lines and downgrade others. Sorry . . . we don't like that, and we won't do it. Everyone will get as fair treatment as we can manage — but if "fair" means saying that a rotten game is a rotten game, that's how it is. We understand that this policy is not the optimum one for collecting big advertising bucks. That's the way it goes. We'd rather have a reputation for honesty than for always pulling punches and "getting along."

Third, every review we receive gets some kind of checking. If the company has been so kind as to send us a review copy of the game, then a staff member can check "outside" reviews against the game. Many reviews have been rejected at this stage because the reviewer clearly hadn't played the game (or had played it wrong!). If we have no copy of the game, we try to find/borrow one. If that's not possible, we tend to go on the reputation of the reviewer. With all other things equal, we prefer to deal with a reviewer

Next Issue



Our March issue will be devoted to computer gaming, with designer's notes by Lord British, creator of Akalabeth;

A featured review of Strategic Simulations' first science fiction game;

"Fantasy World," a story by Timothy Zahn;

"Computers to Go," a marketing effort of special interest to gamers;

Also, the winners of the magic contest;

And more than a few capsule reviews.

we know than a newcomer. (This can be unfair to someone breaking in, and we're sorry. But the important thing to us is to make sure that the readers get the best information possible. We'll encourage a newcomer when we can — like when we have a copy of the game, to check his work — in the hopes that he/she will develop into a "regular.") Several of our regular reviewers live in Austin, which makes it much easier to check and consult.

Fourth, the review format itself calls for each reviewer to make both favorable and unfavorable comments about the game. Nothing has yet been produced that was without flaws, or was (quite) totally worthless. A reviewer who can't look deeply enough to see this is likely to get a rejection slip with the "It seemed extraordinarily biased" line checked off.

So — we can blow it on a review, but we usually don't. Better than half of the complaints we get from publishers about "bad reviews" have ended with a "my gosh, it really does say that in the game, doesn't it?" letter from the company.

And we have even received compliments on *unfavorable* reviews — from publishers saying that they appreciated the comments and would change the game. Now *that's* the kind of publisher our hobby needs more of.

Why should a store carry TSG when some of the reviews say "don't buy this game"? I had this question from a big wholesaler at a convention, and it floored me. I felt like coming back with "Why should a store carry a crummy game instead of sending it back to the wholesaler?" But I didn't — he was serious. Now it seems to me that a store would want a game magazine to carry honest reviews rather than mindless praise of everything. That way the store-owner could use the reviews to guide his buying. I know of several retailers, and at least one wholesaler, who use TSG and other reviews just that way. But I don't know. I'd like to get letters from retailers and wholesalers with *their* views on reviews. Do you want sugar-coating, honesty, or what? And why?

How do you choose games for long reviews instead of capsules? Featured reviews — 1 or 2 pages long — are for two kinds of games: (1) a game from a major publisher, highly plugged, with a "big name." This is the sort of game that everyone will think about buying. Therefore, we run a detailed review as soon as possible so that everyone can make up their minds. A perfect example is TSR's *Expert D&D*, reviewed in this issue. (2) A very good game from a minor publisher (like Eon's *Cosmic Encounter*, last issue) may get a featured review after it's been out a while, just to make sure everyone knows about it. Similarly, we'll do a featured review of GDW's *Triplanetary* (a real SF classic, now being re-issued after years out of print).

Can I write a review? Do you pay? Yes, and yes. Capsule reviews pay a flat \$5 if accepted. Features are a penny a word. See the writers' information in the review section — or send a SASE for our Writers' Guide.

—Steve Jackson

GAME MASTER

GAME MASTER exists to answer questions on your favorite games. If you have a rules question or play problem, send it in. Questions to be answered will be chosen on the basis of general interest. They will be first refereed to the game publisher or designer. If no response is received, *GAME MASTER* will offer its own interpretation of the rule. Sorry — no individual replies are possible.

GAME MASTER also invites publishers to send errata or clarifications for their new games. They will be printed as space allows.

Raid on Iran

Great game . . . but why can only one group of Americans double move each turn?

Also, since Iranians are alerted by the first normal attack, does this mean only one group of Iranians in a building, like the Chancery, can ever be surprised with a +3 bonus?

—John S. Trembley

The double-move doesn't simulate any magical ability of one batch of commandoes each turn to wear winged boots. It is for playability and effect — it keeps the

Iranians from ever being sure just what the Americans are capable of. If all the U.S. troops could double-move, they'd be too powerful — and not as interesting.

Only one group of Iranians in any one building will ever be attacked at the +3, but careful planning will allow the U.S. player to get the +3 two or three times in widely separated areas.

—Steve Jackson

Star Fleet Battles

Task Force Games' Steve Cole writes: "With the aid of our computer, we use an interesting procedure for doing errata sheets. Each time a question comes in, the memory file for that sheet is called up and the required item added. If the question came from outside, we run a print-out of the updated file and sent it to (the writer) . . . If the game is ever reprinted, we use the errata sheet to make the changes required."

Steve sent us the whole Star Fleet Battles errata sheet for our convenience in keeping up with questions. He suggested (and we agree) that a few of the sections were worth printing immediately.

32.62 The last crew unit on a ship cannot be killed by hits scored against the ship. (There would almost always be some survivors.)

59.421 All fighters must have their target in the FA firing arc to have a "lock on" for purposes of firing or guiding drones.

105.8 The batteries on Andromedan

ships can hold five units of power each. 109.5 Hydran fusion beams are destroyed on "torp" hits.

119.217 Tugs are considered to be the same size as CA's. Pods are considered to be "smaller ships" if detached, and part of the Tug if attached.

Ogre/G.E.V

In G.E.V. standard scenarios, can you set up your immobile CP in the lake (underwater)?

—Mark Bassett

No, CPs cannot be set up (or move) on or under water. An amphibious (or wholly aquatic) CP would be an interesting option, but I'll leave it to players to figure it out. It should be more "expensive" than any regular CP.

—SJ

Regarding George Collins' rules for solo play (TSG 35), does the Ogre have to waste a valuable missile on a mere GEV or other unit just because it's within range? I find that by the time the Ogre is near the CP, it's already blown its best weapons.

—Philip A. Natta

Good point. For starters, why not say that the chance the Ogre fires a missile is equal to the number of missiles it has, divided by 6? An Ogre with 6 missiles will always fire one; an Ogre with only one left will fire only on a roll of 6.

—SJ