



Play the universal game: WAR

feature

by Gilbert Bouchard

I had come across legends of those fantastic creatures, wargamers, in local parlance during my dim younger years.

Creatures who over long periods of time would create the daring adventures of Trog the Merciless of the land of Mogdoon slaying dragons and trolls with a flick of the dice, or those wonderful battles of the past like the seven year siege of the Bronx by Ivan the Fuzzy Breath. Creatures I had long ago dismissed along with centaurs, unicorns, and ETS buses that follow their printed schedules.

Until this summer that is, when low and behold one of my roommates was an honest-to-God wargame fanatic. Someone who could sit for

The games are almost as varied as the people who play them, or to put it bluntly, if you can dream it up, some sharpie already boxed it and sold the concept.

Varied as the games are, they can be divided into two categories: boardgames that are self contained, and roleplaying games where the players manufacture their own map-board playing space. These categories can be subdivided into: historical, science fiction, fantasy sport, and political games.

Historical games range from ancient Greece, Camelot, to the Falkland Island dispute. And the playing time ranges from 90 minutes to 2000 hours (the 2000 hour dilly is called "Campaign for North Africa", serious gamers only need apply).

Many of the games demand some

teaching tools introducing a measure of social acceptance.

The movement is growing fast, the U of A wargaming society has doubled in size in the last five years. So whatever the appeal, more and more people are into gaming.

But things are getting a little out of hand. Even before the Falkland Island dispute was over, a "War in the Falklands" game was released, and every day more future confrontation games follow: games such as "The Next War", "Firefight", and "Fuldercap". Seems to me that some gamesmen have more than a detached historical interests in warfare.

As for role playing games, well, people have always escaped in fantasy, from Homer, to Superman, to almost any current film. People enjoy the fantastic. But what is strange is

by multicolored hexagonal illusions as we nod our heads to generals who babble about "winable" nuclear war and plot civil defenses.

Some scientists predict that any major nuclear confrontation could strip enough of the ozone away to kill us all with massive third degree burns and all life on earth within one week. How's that for a future confrontation.

where we all die of sunburn a couple hours after the big boom.

We can't afford war that's for sure. Maybe all we have left as an outlet are these little cardboard mockups. Why don't we give up the symbolic cardboard shades and stop the game playing. Why don't we start dealing with living things?

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hours on end rearranging little cardboard squares on a large cardboard map splattered with tiny multicolored hexagons (a giant mop-art beehive).

After realizing that he probably wasn't hooked on heroin, I decided that I should try to learn one of these "games" just to see how *anyone* can spend 60 hours a week on some endeavor before realizing they don't know how to end the stupid thing.

The game I chose was called "Wizards", or maybe it was called "Sorcerer". Well whatever it was called, I never got past the introduction (actually I never got past chapter XIV of the introduction - a stimulating piece on the repair and upkeep of castle sewer systems). Chapter XIV was when I realized that I'd rather do something more constructive with my time: sniff glue, plot the overthrow of banana republics, take a nap, or even (when I get really desperate) do my required readings.

After that experience I knew I'd never write this piece on first knowledge; that meant it was time for a little research. I wandered over to the Little Wars Game Shop, which happens to be the largest wargames shop in the city. It also happens to be the only games shop I knew about and is only a few blocks from where I live. (So much for diligent research).

The shop is relatively new to the city, three years old. Its proprietor, a Mr. Derek Frost, explained that the market for gaming has only recently been tapped. A new market but rather lucrative since the shop is relatively small, no larger than my living room, yet contains over \$50,000 dollars worth of stock.

The shop also shares retail space with The Hobbit (a science fiction specialty shop). Both spaces aim for the same 12 to 30 year old crowd willing to plunk their sometimes not-so-hard-earned money on a wide range of war game and science fiction related paraphernalia. The gaming materials include: science fiction kits (largest selection of model space ships in the city), military magazines, gaming magazines (Dragon, Nexus, White Dwarf, etc.) and a full selection of figurines and toy soldiers.

These same 12 to 30 year olds run the gambit from dabblers who play one to two hours a week, to hard cases who blow 60 to 80 hours. Recent media exposure has swelled wargamers ranks but the market always existed. Though never exploited to this level, there probably always were people with disproportionate amounts of energy, time and patience.

historical background and research for players to get some measure of enjoyment out of the game, or even to utilize the games properly.

While much of the hype and excitement over D and D (Dungeons and Dragons) will probably blow over, historical wargaming has a much broader and longer lasting appeal. People are attracted to subjects with relevance to their fields of studies, personal interests or current events.

And after all that research it is a shame to let it all go to waste, so people keep on playing. Now even schools are getting into the act utilizing historical war games as

spending huge amounts of time creating roles and scenarios instead of going out and doing something to shape your own life into something exciting. Reality must still be a little more exciting than two dimensional role playing.

These games, are they really as harmless as people want us to believe? When wars are reduced to little battle strategies and cardboard battalions and the A bomb is just one more little count with its own point value, we seem to forget that people did really die.

In more and more minds the reality is dimming and being replaced

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