

BEGINNING BOARDGAMING

HISTORY

I guess one of the first things that many of us has asked about boardgaming is how did it all begin? Well, to start off, boardgaming is a relatively new aspect of the Wargame Hobby and it is less than 25 years old. To be more specific, the first boardgame was "Tactics" designed by an energetic young man by the name of Charles S. Roberts in the year 1953.

Tactics dealt with a conflict between two hypothetical countries each of which had an Army of the pre-World War II type. In this game the objective was for one side to gain control of the other country and thus win the game. In the five years that followed Tactics sold only about 2000 copies, so you can see even in 1958 it still couldn't be considered a Hobby.

In 1958 Charles S. Roberts decided that he could make a living from designing and selling games, therefore, in the fall of that year he formed what was to become the Avalon Hill Company. Avalon Hill was not founded primarily for producing Wargames as many people think but as a source of Adult games. As can be seen, of the 18 titles that were produced between 1958 and 1963 nine of these titles were non-wargame titles.

Then, in 1964 disaster struck the Avalon Hill Co. in the form of the discount houses. These discount houses were underselling the normal retailers that Avalon Hill

was dealing with and this was causing the games not to be sold at their proper prices. Things were made even worse when Avalon Hill lost the accounts of about 25 % of their retail dealers because of bankruptcy. All this put Avalon Hill in deep financial debt and spelled the downfall of the company.

At this point, Charles Roberts had two choices, one he could declare bankruptcy or he could turn the company over to the creditors. Charles Roberts decided to turn the company over to one of the largest creditors, Monarch Services, he left the scene after he had payed off almost all of the smaller creditors. Monarch then put the company in the very capable hands of Thomas N. Shaw.

Thomas Shaw had the job of bringing the company back to its feet by making a number of changes and additions. One of the major contributions that he made to the hobby was that in 1964 he started publishing the "General." The General was the first magazine that was devoted entirely to the hard core gamer and at this time it could clearly be seen that there was a hobby being formed.

In 1966, Chris Wagner and Lyle E. Smethers decided that they were not satisfied with the material that they were getting in the General so they decided that they would start their own publications known as "Strategy and Tactics". Strategy and Tactics was going to deal with some of the areas that were not touched by the General

such as Miniatures. Strategy and Tactics actually started as another version of the General but covered a wider variety of subjects that were not handled in the General.

However, in 1968 things also started to look bad for Strategy and Tactics. Their circulation rate and subscriber renewal rate were not as high as they had hoped. Another factor that can be attributed to the demise of Strategy and Tactics is that the years 1966 to 1969 were the lean years of the hobby and as such the following was not enough to sustain two Wargaming publications.

In 1969 Chris Wagner was looking around for someone to take over Strategy and Tactics. He approached James Dunnigan who had already designed many boardgames for Avalon Hill and a few other companies and asked him if he would like to take it over. Jim Dunnigan at first thought that it would be too big of a job to handle but there were other ideas that were flashing around in his head. He had the idea of producing a large number of games and he knew that he would need an outlet for them so this is one of the reasons that he decided to undertake the rebuilding of Strategy and Tactics.

Now began the era of James Dunnigan and Strategy and Tactics (Simulations Publications, Inc.). Under his guiding hand Strategy and Tactics magazine began putting a game in every issue and also producing a number of other games which they sold separately under the Test Series

Game titles. This is the point where the Boardgame Hobby really began to take form. No longer were people limited to specific titles or periods because Simulations Publications, Inc. was producing games at an unbelievable rate. Strategy and Tactics magazine at this time was still putting games in the magazine and this seemed to appeal to people because before long the circulation of the magazine began to rise and before you knew it Strategy and Tactics was now the magazine of the Hobby.

Boardgaming as a hobby could really be traced to the Dunnigan era and Strategy and Tactics. Before Jim Dunnigan all that people had was the General and now there were two magazines and with the increase in popularity of boardgaming both magazines were doing better than ever before. As you can see, we can actually say that boardgaming as a hobby began around the year 1969.

Since 1969 when Strategy and Tactics began putting games in with their magazine many others have tried doing the same thing, some with success and others with failure. Three companies that readily come to mind are JagdPanther, Spartan and Conflict Magazines. Of these three publications, JagdPanther and Spartan are still coming out on a regular basis. Conflict Magazine by Simulations Design Corporation now only sells games, as they've suspended publication of their magazine.

Today there are also many magazines that are devoted to just the game playing side of the Hobby. These mag-

azines carry articles on different strategies or tactics that players can use in the course of a game. These magazines also run contests from time to time. The winners are awarded games from their companies. Some of these magazines or papers are published by the Board-gaming Companies themselves and others are published by small Wargaming clubs as newspapers. But all of these publications are worthwhile to the game player who holds an avid interest in the hobby, as one can always learn. I would say that the three main publications dealing with just the game playing side of the hobby today are the General by Avalon Hill, Moves by Simulations Publications, Inc. and Panzerfaust by Don Lowry. All three of these magazines come out on a regular basis and have many interesting articles that are devoted entirely to the boardgame hobby.

Also during the last ten years many clubs have been created with devotion just to the boardgame hobby. Some of these clubs are devoted just to their area and others are devoted to Playing Boardgames by Mail (PBM). Avalon Hill International Kriegspiel Society (AHIKS) is one of these clubs devoted to playing Wargames by mail. AHIKS supervises and finds matches for any wargame now in print and also produces a quarterly magazine called the "Kommandeur" which is entirely devoted to the boardgame hobby. In the last few years another club has arisen, though not as large as AHIKS, it still has a fairly large

following and this club's name is Conflict Simulation Society. This club puts out a paper called the Outpost and at the time of the writing of this article they are talking about putting games in their paper, so watch this club it could turn into something big. Today there is a hobby whereas 7 years ago there was only a glimpse of one.

Today, the State of the Art of Boardgaming is so high that many of the rules for boardgaming could also, with minor modifications, be used as Miniature Rules. There is no real reason that I can see why the two hobbies cannot co-exist and help each other instead of the invisible barrier that seems to be there today. Both Boardgaming and Miniatures could learn from one another and both could aid the other if given the chance.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This is a question that many of you may have asked after reading this far into the article. What lies ahead for the Boardgamer or Miniature Player? Well, in July of this year there was a big Boardgame Convention that was held in Baltimore and this was a big success. From all that I understand there is going to be another convention next year at the same place. At this convention there were a number of Tournaments held and the winners of these tournaments were given trophies and cash prizes. So there is some sort of a professionalism already creeping into the hobby and I for one am all for it.

In the future I am hoping to see that invisible barrier

between the Boardgame World and the Miniature Kingdom torn down and see both hobbies work in conjunction with one another, helping each other out. Also, I see an International Wargame Confederation that will host tournaments and out of these tournaments will arise Grandmasters just like the Chess Federation. All of this I am sure we will see to some extent in the future because Wargaming is starting to be an accepted hobby and one that can do nothing but grow. Every year more and more people will get started in the hobby, most of them beginning with Boardgames and then at a later stage moving on into Miniatures. So, many of the new generation Wargamers that are coming up now and in the future will combine both the Boardgames and the Miniatures into ONE Wargame Hobby.

BOARDGAMES

In this next section I will try to give you some idea of how the Boardgame Companies think and also an idea of what I think makes a good game. At the end of the article I will list a number of games and the companies that they are available from in three different categories Novice games, for the beginner; Intermediate games, for the people with some boardgaming experience; and Complex games, these should only be attempted by people who have been playing boardgames for a year or so.

Each of three major Boardgame Companies have a different outlook on how the design of a game should be and what a game should consist of. Avalon Hill Company seems to design

games primarily for playability and secondly for the Historical accuracy. I'm not saying that Avalon Hill's games are not historically accurate but its just at times they don't put everything in that could go into the game. Simulations Publications, Inc. designs games with the opposite view in mind. They try to achieve historical realism and this at times hinders the playability of the game. Games Designers Workshop so far seems to be the only company that has been successful in achieving the medium of historical accuracy with playability. Game Designers Workshop games can be easily understood in a short while by those of you who have had prior boardgaming experience. Their games somehow give you the feeling of the era of the battle that you are recreating and this makes that game even more enjoyable.

Don't get the wrong impression that one Wargame Company produces better games than another because its up to the individual as to the type of game he prefers. Some people want a simple game and don't care about history and others want a complex historically accurate game. Its all up to the individual and his tastes of what he is looking for to decide what he wants. All of the game companies now produce games in all of the catagories and all that you have to do to find out what they are is to contact the companies and request their catalog which will explain all their games.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD GAME?

There are many different views as to what should be included in a game to make it good. Some people say that it is the special rules or the different variations that you can play that make the game. Others say that you need realism in the game to have a good game but how much realism can you get into a game? I say that the first thing you need is a set of well written, thoroughly tested rules to make a good game. This in my opinion is the area where a lot of the games have failed in the past. Today they have been making changes and coming up with better rules every try. The rules should be self explanatory with examples showing any of the conflicting points or questionable areas, therefore, leaving no room for doubt.

Another important area is the physical appearance of the product that you are buying or selling. This physical appearance is very important and people would much rather buy a game with die cut counters and a heavy stock map than with a paper map and counters that they have to mount and paste on themselves. Also, any charts and tables that you give in the rules should also be included on a separate sheet of paper (one for each player) so that players do not have to go leafing through the rules everytime that they have to look at a chart. This is another one of the items that I feel really annoys some of the more avid gamers. Also, all the information that a player needs to play the game should be included right on

the Unit Counters so here again he doesn't have to go looking through the rules for the information to play the game.

Since most of the publicity in the hobby is either through the magazines or word of mouth to friends and neighbors the above points can either make or break a game. I'm not saying that the above are necessities because most important of them all is the rules for without a well thought out rules section you don't have a game.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIMPLE AND COMPLEX GAMES

Actually, the difference between what makes a simple game and what makes a complex game is often the subject that is being covered and the point that the designer is trying to make. Simple games normally have the four basic rules which are Movement, Combat, Stacking and Zones of Control. In these games there are also a minimum number of different type units and the three basic types that are normally included are Infantry, Armour (Cavalry) and Artillery. Take these basic units and rules, apply them to any period that you want to and believe it or not you could design a game.

But now starts the hard part, different battles had many special considerations. For example, if you were going to refight a battle where one army was far from their home country you would have to add some rules to cover the logistical side of the Campaign. Also, depending

on the era of the battle that you are fighting, you may also have to add special rules on the different types of tactics that each side could use in the game. Plus, if it is a modern battle you would have to take into consideration Air, Naval or may even Nuclear types of weapon systems into your game system. Therefore, before you know it your simple game is starting to look like a complex one.

It is my opinion that a big game with a lot of rules does not necessarily have to be a complex game. By this I mean that if the designers would first start out with the basics and then add a little at a time they would there by give the players of the game a chance to understand everything that they are doing with the game. So you can use the four basic rules as stepping stones in the building of a larger game that does not have to be complex just because it is large. Too many times the designers throw all of the rules at the players in one section and by the time that they get to the end of the rules they've forgotten what they read at the beginning of the rules. If they do things by steps the players will be able to keep up with them and everyone will have an enjoyable game.

Below I will list games that are available on the Boardgame market today from the various manufacturers. These games will be listed in three categories: N-Novice- a good game for beginners to learn with; I-Intermediate-need some boardgaming experience to play these; and C-Complex-

COMPANY Game Designers Workshop
203 North Street
Normal, IL 61761

GAMES Chaco --(I) Conflict between Bolivia and Paraguay covered in this game. (Good game for beginners who want to advance to the Intermediate category.)

Drang Nach Osten--(C) German invasion of Russia in 1941-1942 all aspects of the Campaign are covered.

COMPANY JagdPanther
Box 3565
Amarillo, TX 79106

GAMES Zepplin --(N) World War I Zepplin bombing of England and Aerial warfare against them.

The Rigelian Wars--(I) Hypothetical battles in the far future between two Galactic Empires. A Science Fiction Game.

Goetterdaemmerung--(C) Final 91 days of Nazi Germany on both fronts.

COMPANY Rand
Box 1776
Liberty Corners, NJ 07938

GAMES Lee vs Meade --(N) Recreates the Battle of Gettysburg during the ACW.

Napoleon's Last Stand--(I) Napoleon's last battles against the Empires of Europe during 1814 and 1815.

Von Manstein --(C) Recreates the Battle for the Ukraine from 1941 to 1944.

COMPANY Simulations Design Corp.
P.O. Box 19096
San Diego, CA 92119

GAMES Norad --(N) Game of Strategic Air Warfare
Russians vs Norad.
Battle for Hue--(I) Recreates the battle in Vietnam
for the city of Hue.
Jerusalem 48 --(C) The Israeli fight for freedom
in 1948.

COMPANY Simulations Publications, Inc.
44 East 23rd Street
New York City, NY 10010

GAMES Blue and Grey --(N) Recreates four Civil War battles
Shiloh, Antietam, Chickamauga
and Gettysburg.
PanzerArmee Afrika--(I) Recreates battles in North Africa
during World War II.
USN --(C) Entire Pacific Campaign during
World War II is presented in
this game.

Here is the list of alternate games on different subjects
available from small private companies or individuals:

NOVICE GAMES Friedland 1807 - Napoleonic battle against Russia
at Friedland in 1807. (Excellent
for the beginner, many examples
in the rules.)

BY: Imperial Games
2035 H West Park Row
Arlington, TX 76013

Rommel - North Africa battles on armoured warfare.
(Not bad for beginners.)

BY: Loren Sperry
1014 N 4th Street
Sheboygan, WI 53081

Chickamauga - Simulation of a Civil War Battle in an
easy to follow manner (Good for a Beginner)

BY: Flying Buffalo
Box 1467
Scottsdale, Az 85252

War of Wizards - Battle between two Wizards
with spells and monsters.
(Interesting and fun.)

BY: Tactical Studies Rules
542 Sage Street
Lake Geneva, WI 53147

INTERMEDIATE GAMES

Manassas - First Battle of Bull Run an excellent
game for the ACW Wargamer.

BY: Historical Simulations
85 High Street
Charlestown, MA 02129

Starship Combat - Science Fiction game about
interstellar conflicts.

BY: Gary D. McGath
Box 1245
Lafayette, IN 47902

COMPLEX GAMES

Battle of Britain - Aerial Warfare during WWII
over Britain. (Rewritten rules make it a little
easier to follow.)

BY: Lou Zocchi
1513 Newton Dr.
Biloxi, Miss 39532

Battle for the Atlantic, Raiders of the North and
Undersea Warriors: - All three games are very, very
complex/confusing games with rules written in
a narrative form.

BY: Taurus Games
1010 North La Salle St.
Chicago, Ill 60610

The Battles for Tobruk - Rommel's first battles
against the allies in Africa in 1941.

BY: Balboa Game Co.
Box 989
Belflower, Ca 90706

Stellar Conquest - Science Fiction game where Players
conquer the Galaxies while fighting off
their enemies.

BY: Metagaming Concepts
P.O. Box 15346
Austin, Texas 78752

Wooden Ships and Iron Men - Naval fighting during
the age of Sail, 1793 - 1815.

BY: Battleline
Box 1064
Douglasville, Ga 30134

In closing I hope that I have brought a little light on the subject of Boardgaming to many people and maybe even gotten a few of you interested in this Hobby. By no means should Boardgaming be thought of as a childs game as it is a very intricate and challenging Hobby. For those of you just starting out in Boardgaming, all the advice that I can give to you is to stay in the Novice catagory untill you are sure of what you are doing and then move up the scale slowly. Remember, don't fall for the Title of the game, but look to see if you could understand the game and in this way you will become a Good and Understanding Wargamer. So, Happy Wargaming.....