# Of Dice and Meeples



Issue 7 November 2026

# Colophon

## Introduction

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If you'd like to be informed when new issues become available for download, please join our forum at https://discussion.tekeli.li/c/23, or you can check our website at https://tekeli.li/of-dice-and-meeples/. The APA is assembled with the free software apatools.

## Contributor Guidelines

Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Of Dice and Meeples will be available to the public for free, so matters you don't want publicly known should be discussed elsewhere. Please adhere to all the normal rules of public discourse: no libel, no inciting violence, no infringement of another's copyright or trademark, and no pornography.

Zines should use reasonable page dimensions (if it's not roughly A4 or 8.5″×11″ there should be a reason). Maximum zine length is 16 pages/10,000 words. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages/1,200 words. AI-generated material is not allowed. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, unless it is in the public domain.

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Contributors may submit their PDF zines via email to of-dice-and-meeples@tekeli.li

Submission deadlines and Ignorable Themes for the next several issues are as follows:

Issue #8 — 6 December: Rulebooks: the good, the bad, the weird
Issue #9 — 6 January: Wargames
Issue #10 — 6 February: Solo gaming

Suggestions for further Ignorable Themes are welcome!

This project is explicitly inspired by Ever & Anon, the digital APA successor to *Alarums & Excursions*.

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Cover by RogerBW.

This issue's Ignorable Theme is: Essen Spiel and other conventions

# What is This?

A Newbie's Guide to APAs

Q: What is this?

A: An APA.

Q: What's an APA?

A: An Amateur Press Association.

Q: What's that?

A: A collection of zines. It can also refer to the community of people writing the zines.

Q: What's a zine?

A: A fanzine. A small, amateur magazine usually distributed for free or at cost.

Q: So this is a collection of free fanzines written by amateurs?

A: Exactly.

Q: And each one has a separate author?

A: Right.

Q: But I see the same names appearing again and again throughout.

A: Those are comments. We comment on each other's zines. When you see "RogerBW: blah-blah-blah…," if there are no quotes around the blah-blah-blah, that's probably a comment to Roger.

Q: And everyone is doing all this for free?

A: Yes. It's like a cocktail party, but all written out. Come join us, if you like. Amateur Press Associations date back to the late 1800s and started to become popular among fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts during the 1930s. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association.

Q: But now there are blogs and various online forums, so why do APAs still exist?

A: Because one type of forum isn't necessarily any better or worse than the others. One advantage of the APA model is longevity. Because they have multiple contributors and don't rely on making money, APAs are more durable than individual blogs or traditional magazines. Also, because websites come and go, whatever is posted online will probably eventually vanish into the electronic ether. But whatever is put into a publication that can be downloaded and archived is more likely to survive due to the sheer fact that multiple copies will exist. And the back issues become an indelible record of what people used to think. They provide insight into a world that used to be.




Send us a zine. Or some cover art. Or comments. Or a blurb.

Or tell us why we're wrong.

Send your thoughts to of-dice-and-meeples@tekeli.li, and provided they aren't laced with powergamer profanity (or maybe even if they are), we'll likely publish them for the enlightenment & edification of the entire APA. Please include your name, collection size, and why *Flash Point: Fire Rescue* is the best game of all time, and be sure to feed your workers.

Abbreviations & Acronyms You May Need to Know:

- APA: Amateur Press Association
- Async: a slow online game where you're called back to take your turn
- BBG: Big Bad Guy/Gal (a major villain)
- BGA: Board Game Arena, a site for playing games online
- BTW: By the way
- XdY: X Y-sided dice added together; omit the X if it's 1.
- Frex: For example
- FWIW: For what it's worth
- IgTheme: Ignorable theme
- IIRC: If I recall correctly
- IM(H)O: In my (humble) opinion
- Monopoly: we don't talk about this "game"
- Nextish/Thish/Lastish: Next, This, Last issue
- (N)PC: (Non-)Player Character
- ODaM: *Of Dice and Meeples*
- PBEM: Play-by-Email
- PBF: Play-by-Forum
- RAE(BNC): Read and enjoyed (but no comment)
- Re: Regarding
- RHCT(M): Regarding his/her comment to (me)
- RYCT(M): Regarding your comment to (me)
- RYQT(M): Regarding your question to (me)
- TTS: TableTop Simulator, a physics engine for playing virtual boardgames
- WRT: With respect to / With regard to
- YMMV: Your mileage may vary
- Zine: A writer's contribution

ISSUE 7 **FRANK CAVIL** NOV 2026

## LEGENDARY BEGINNINGS

For as long as I can remember, the ball-park population figures for my birthplace of Guernsey, Channel Islands, have been 60k or so. As a kid, I'd picture a football stadium with every single seat filled with someone from the island, highlighting both how tiny we were as a rock, and how massive some stadiums can be.

While there are definitely thousands of geeks amongst that population, there aren't enough for a Board Game convention. The closest equivalent I can think of is *The Big Geekend*, where a local museum sets out a bunch of tables for various fandoms to just nerd out over for a couple of days. This year, so I'm told, the board game table (the *one* board game table) was flanked by a waxwork Bronze Age family and information boards about how they viewed the concept of Death.

So you can imagine my surprise when we decided to go to the *UK Games Expo* in 2018, which saw 21,700 unique visitors pass through the doors to do all sorts of gamey things, on many, many, *many* more tables.

I'm going to completely gloss over that I got Sir Ian Livingstone's autograph in a new printing of ***Deathtrap Dungeon***, and spotting Tom Vasel wandering around the Free Play area while playing one of the ***Lord of the Rings*** deckbuilding games, and instead talk about ***Star Realms***, which had a Legends Tournament on one of the afternoons that my partner and I decided to enter.

For those who don't know, ***Star Realms*** is a no-nonsense 2 player competitive deckbuilder that'll see you purchase spaceships and bases to whittle down your opponents authority (not actually health, but basically health) to nothing.




The Megahauler here, signed by one of the designers, Rob Dougherty, is one such ship. It'll give you 5 authority/health when you play it, and allow you to top-deck any ship in the market for free. If you play or have already played another Trade Federation card (a blue card) on the same turn, the Megahauler gets to draw a card - I wonder which card that'll be...

You can see how turns can become combos that generate loads of money to buy more cards and heaps of damage to punch through your opponent's defenses, and it is in these Legends Tournaments that you can put your skills to the test against players who all want the glory of winning a round robin knockout with the grand prize of becoming immortalised as a character on a future ***Star Realms*** card.

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*Matt Elliott doesn't really 'do' conventions. He doesn't really 'not do' conventions either. What he's struggling to say is that he sometimes goes to some Board Game conventions, but not regularly. How unconventional?*

I wasn't expecting that level of success, but as we were first timers to a convention, why not also be first timers to a tournament at one too?

Once more I'm going to gloss over the start to the tournament, not because I lost the opener to Michael, front left, in a matter of minutes, but because I'm going to skip to the good bit.



*Photo by Emma Griffin*

This photograph is of the Quarter Finals, and I'm definitely in it - just. You can see my quiff more than the rest of me.

I'm facing Ian, in the red t-shirt, and it happened to be the second time we were paired against each other that afternoon. Of all the competitors I faced that day, Ian was the one who I thought we could have played 100 games and come out with 50 wins each. On this day though, a 2-1 victory took me to the Semi Final, where I was up against Vitalij, sat front right in the plaid shirt.

I'm not going to say it was a slaughter, but when designer/tournament judge Rob asked "Does anyone have any questions before I quickly grab bite to eat?", I replied "Yeah, why are there so many cards with a 'Draw a card' ability, and why are they all in Vitalij's deck?"

It's probably *not* good tournament etiquette to ask such a question in the middle of a Semi Final, but it was my fault for not playing ***Star Realms*** as the designer intended - and he was right there grabbing a bite to eat, so I could have asked him to be sure...



*Photo by Emma Griffin*

The final match then was Vitalij vs Tim, sat on Vitalij's right in both photos. By now everyone else had left, and I was hanging on for the sake of seeing the outcome (and as promos got dished out between rounds, we were hoovering up those that got abandoned. Don't worry, we asked for permission).

There wasn't a third-place play off. I don't even know who I'd be up against, but I've always said I probably would have lost it, so my claim to fame after my debut board game tournament is "At one point in the Top 4 UK ***Star Realms*** players". Technically true, right? Though I highly doubt I could repeat it if the chance arose again...

The last thing I remember about the tournament was asking Tim something like "Did your deck have 7 cards in it?", meaning "Had you scrapped out so many useless cards that you were effectively drawing your entire deck as a new hand each turn?", to which the answer was "Yeah, it was pretty scrap heavy that game."

It's a good job I never faced Tim - I would definitely have lost.

I don't remember what we did after that. It was probably time for some food, it may even have been the last day we were there, I've no idea.

I guess I only remembered the good bits.

# LEGENDARY DELAYS

So Tim was going to feature on a ***Star Realms*** card at some point in the future, and as I have history in the very tournament that lead to such a card, I was going to get hold of that card no matter what. I should still like ***Star Realms*** by the time it comes out, right?

Well, I do, yes. I play it damn near every day on my phone, albeit solely against the AI, whose most obvious flaw is to not have the decency to only do enough damage to win. Instead, you need to sit through its entire turn, waiting for its combo to animate as it draws everything it can, scraps everything it can, squeezes out every single point of damage possible before finally hitting you in the face for 30odd damage when just 3 was needed...

Anyway, yes, I still like ***Star Realms***. I've got its chunky Universal Storage box about two thirds full with sleeved decks, expansions, and promos - not everything that has existed with a ***Star Realms*** logo on it, but much of it, up to a point - for you see, I've got a problem with Wise Wizard Games these days...

They are *notorious* for Kickstarter delays that stretch into years, and for a game designed to have everything you need to play in one box, there are an *awful* lot of boxes and boosters marketed as must haves to make your collection complete.

One Kickstarter was a remake of whatever content already existed, but on shiny foil cards instead. I'm a fan, yes, but not of sparkly cards.

Another Kickstarter turned ***Star Realms*** into a legacy/campaign game, where you crafted cards with stickers and had your own personal set at the end of it. That's not really appealing to me either, but this time I *had* to chip in enough money to that 2022 round of funding for one important reason: one of the add-ons (thankfully an add-on, and not stuck into the base game I didn't want) featured Tim.

Four years after I had seen him win in person, I saw him rendered in a spaceship in ***Star Realms***, and during those four years, largely thanks to these Kickstarters, I have questioned whether this will be the last ***Star Realms*** card I ever intend to buy, such is my dislike for the way things have gone.

Naturally, I had to wait another three years for that add-on deck to arrive (and in the meantime, *another* all-foil 'complete' ***Star Realms*** set was 3074% funded), but finally, in March 2025, *seven years* after learning that he would become a card, I could finish this story by sleeving him up and putting him alongside all the other promos I'd gathered over the years.

And in those 7 years, UKGE attendance figures have ballooned to some 40-50k unique entrants each year, but that one in 2018 is the only time we've been. If we ever go again, and there happens to be a ***Star Realms*** Legends Tournament... never say never, but it's not likely.



# LEGENDARY ACCOUNTS

This is now the **Star Realms** issue, and it wasn't just Kickstarter campaigns that had concerned me regarding the future of **Star Realms** - it was Gamefound, too.

**Star Realms Conquest** is a new standalone base game (great!) with *16* expansions (alright?) that will be *all-digital* (okaaay...) and *only* digital 'because tariffs' (ah).

Now, the **Star Realms** app for mobile and desktop is one of the best board game apps you'll come across, and has been for years. It takes what is already a quick card game and makes it quicker. No shuffling, automatic resolution of card effects, reminders that you're about to hit 'End Turn' without dishing out any damage, which is kinda the point of the game, so don't be forgetting to do that...

But it isn't perfect. Players at the tabletop have full control over exactly when the faction ability of a ship or base triggers during their turn. Generally speaking, as soon as it is available you'll choose to use it, but that isn't always the case. The app however assumes that it *is*, and has done so for years, so players of both physical and digital versions have just had to live with it - along with the glaring omission of an 'Undo Move' option.

As I write this however, Version 2 of the app is available to test which finally corrects these faults, making a fantastic app even more consistent when compared to the physical game, and if that's the case, what's the problem with backing **Star Realms Conquest**?

Because testing those features isn't a reward for the most experienced players, or valued members of the community, or even early birds to this Gamefound project. Testing is locked behind a Legends Account, and a Legends Account is yours for the low low price of $120.

Now, it does give you every piece of DLC, past *and* future, but I already own most of that list, digitally *and* physically. I am not paying for it all for a *third* time.

I could *not* get a Legends Account, and simply pay $30 for the **Conquest** content, which is advertised as being worth $70, so buying it now would be a better choice, but my preference - for as fantastic as the app is - would be to get it physically, and there are no plans for that to happen.

Well, officially speaking, as of 2025. As soon as the coffers start running dry, there'll be plans alright, tariffs or not. And then suckers like me will have to ask themselves whether they really need more of the same...



# LEGENDARY GAMEPLAY

I've gone and put all these articles in the wrong order really, haven't I, for unless you've played **Star Realms** already you've got no idea why I'm so fond of it.

In **Dominion**, the grandfather of deckbuilding games, players use weak starting cards to buy stronger cards from a fixed marketplace which will hopefully cycle through their decks turn after turn in an efficient manner, so they can be used to buy the Victory Points needed to win.

Building upon that is **Ascension**, which turned the fixed marketplace into a river of changing cards, such that you couldn't work out a winning strategy on Turn 1 and had to react to what was available instead. Also in that ever-changing market were monsters who could be defeated for an instant reward, giving you (broadly speaking) two ways to win: buy things or battle things.

**Star Realms** takes that evolving marketplace, strips it of monsters, and has you directly attack your opponents instead, last player standing wins.

It seems so simple because it is. You can go out and buy one of at least three different 'base games' of **Star Realms** to see this in action, and if you like it, you can combine them together for a game with more players or, better yet, a marketplace with more stuff in it.

And 'more stuff for the marketplace' is basically where every expansion comes in, because once you've got that core gameplay, you can put all manner of little twists on it.

If there are four factions of ships and each faction works better when paired with other cards of its faction, what happens if some ships belong to two factions, or to none?

What if there are Hero cards, like Fleet Manager Moss, who don't go into your deck but sit around on the sidelines, waiting to be used whenever you want, or Event cards that interrupt the turn until their effects are resolved?

What if there are Technology cards that give abilities like removing a card from the marketplace for a small price? Denying your opponent the option of ever buying a card is a useful ability on a ship, but having that same ability every turn instead...

And of course you can modify the gameplay outside of the marketplace too. Give players Missions to complete for an alternate victory condition, or one-time use Gambits to get them out of a tricky situation, or even a Commander with their own unique starting deck to get players into the action a turn or two quicker.

The killer feature with deckbuilders like **Star Realms**, **Ascension**, and **Dominion** is that with a strong core, if another deckbuilder comes along with a neat idea of its own, you can probably shoehorn it into your game in a new expansion. I wonder what the twist on the **Conquest** set was, seeing as I never really looked upon learning of the Legends Account...

It seems Planet cards are now found in the marketplace, and if you dish out enough damage to them, and not to your opponent, you get an ongoing reward. So they're basically the monster cards from **Ascension** then. Not gonna lie, that would be nice to see in **Star Realms**.

I suppose I could just play **Ascension** of course, but the box is so very heavy these days... As is the **Dominion** box. And **Eminent Domain**. Did I mention that I *really* like deckbuilders?






Image from Wayback Machine archive of uvsgames.com

## LEGENDARY CROSSOVER

The one thing **Star Realms** and the like *can't* do so easily is include content from other properties. I suppose there could be a promo here and there that might not look too out of place, but you can't just drop something like a **Blakes 7** inspired expansion into the mix and expect it to work. (I don't know why my brain landed on **Blakes 7**, I've never seen it.)

No, what you need to do instead is license your strong gameplay core out to another publisher who has access to the **Star Trek** screengrab library so **Star Trek Star Realms** can become a reality.

I haven't played this version but it is functionally identical to the original **Star Realms** set, the only changes being the retheme and the bizarre decision to make various important icons, like how much strength a base has, much harder to see at a glance.

Because **Star Trek** has plenty of in-universe stuff to pull from, all the duplicate ships and bases now have unique card art, with the definition of a 'base' being expanded into locations, allowing for *Starfleet Headquarters* to have a card and not look too out of place.

Most of the images chosen for all these ships could really do with a splash of colour, but there's not much of that in the depths of space, and you can only work with what you've got, as I found out with my **Rogue SquadRun** retheme a few issues back.

If you've got 2-4 Trekkies at hand, the base set has you covered, but when combined with the **Borg Invasion** expansion, you've got a solo experience too, where you can face off against a Borg Cube that assimilates cards in the marketplace to thwart your plans. It might even scale to a co-op challenge. I can't see why it wouldn't, I'm sure the **Star Realms** challenges could do so too.

**Star Trek Star Realms** was only released a few years ago, in 2024, but already the main link listed on BoardGameGeek goes to a 404, hence the need to pull the *U.S.S. Enterprise*-D from the Wayback Machine, and outside of the Wise Wizard Games webstore, there's nothing on their websites either.

I can't imagine there being much demand for retheming the entire **Star Realms** card list into the **Star Trek** universe, but surely if there's enough of a desire to have made a **Star Trek** set in the first place, there must be some amount of desire to at least make its existence known outside of BGG. Did the license expire so soon, with strict instructions to never mention it again after the fact? Clearly I don't know a whole lot about the world of IP licensing.

While I'm way out here on the final frontier, is there anything else with a **Star Realms** logo that I've forgotten about? Other than the kids version, **Star Realms Academy**, with the tagline *'My First Deckbuilder'*, that is...

# LEGENDARY ACRONYM

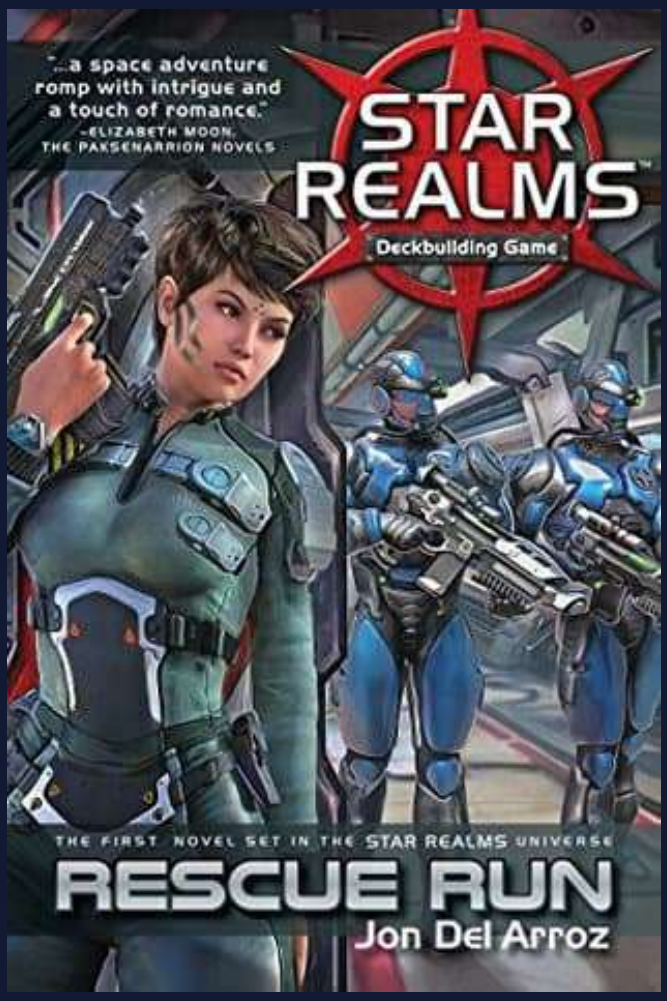
Did you know **Star Realms** has a novel? I was never in a rush to read **Rescue Run** on the understanding it was 'meh' at best, but read it I have, and let's just say credit to Jon Del Arroz for having written a novel in the first place, for it is a bit of a bore to get through.

Your first stumbling block will likely be the main character's opening line: *"Hey G.O.D., you there?"*. Joan Shengtu, a young thief, is of course talking to her personal AI, the 'GIC Onboard Diagnostic tool', the GIC being the 'Galactic Intellisource Corporation', and GICOD(t) presumably being too silly a name to keep shouting when calling upon the services of an Onboard Diagnostic tool.

Joan considers G.O.D. to be her closest friend, which is concerning. Perhaps this story was ahead of its time, what with all the AI-induced psychosis floating around these days. Supposedly Del Arroz was trying to make a point about how ingrained we are in technology and that compassion for others ought to be our focus. A noble cause, but one put on the back foot just a little when the inevitable romance opens with the bloke remarking that Joan's *"party ensemble only amplified her natural gifts, and she didn't contain many bodymods—at least cosmetic ones that he could tell—at all."* Love at first sight, obviously...

But like **Star Trek Star Realms**, there's not a lot of stuff about **Rescue Run** online, certainly in the gaming sphere, and again there seems to be no mention of Wise Wizards Games promoting it themselves. I know Internet search has gotten a whole lot worse in the last decade, but that's a bit weird, isn't it?

There might be a reason for that. Del Arroz still blogs, and even has a video discussing Wise Wizard Games announcing staff cuts at the end of 2025. He's still invested somewhat in the IP then, let's check this out, see what his take is on it, given his history with them.




Cover image from Goodreads.com

Barely a minute into the video, he says "I wrote a novelisation on **Star Realms** before I was, you know, 'a bad person', right? Before they knew I voted for Donald Trump."

Well, I think this is going to need some context, and I might just find it on another blog which lists 16 incidents of harassment and trolling by Del Arroz described as 'not a comprehensive history' but a 'sampling'. And 8 *years* have gone by since it was written. G.O.D.damn. I certainly wasn't expecting to descend into M.A.G.A. madness as a result of researching a novel inspired by a card game this afternoon.

Nothing rewarding comes of reading **Rescue Run**, except for the feeling that if I tried, I too could be an author. That and being able to play DiCaprio_pointing.gif whenever a **Star Realms** card is shoehorned into a sentence.

Thank G.O.D. for shadow libraries, by the way.

# TO ME

*"I might as well retheme it to something I'll enjoy looking at"*

*— Roger BW*

That's about the gist of it, yeah. I'm not going to say "I like learning new skills" but in the process of grabbing assets and remixing them into new formats, there's bound to be the odd moment where I actually could do with understanding what such-and-such a tool in this-or-that program does, which I'm sure will be beneficial to me in the long run.

The other big appeal is being able to dive into something that you haven't got a complete picture of, or haven't been invested in for a while. Rediscovering something from your past is just as cool as discovering something new.

I can't recall where I first saw ***Air Land & Sea***, a small but generic WWII themed card game, but like many others I saw the potential for a new coat of paint. The *BoardGameGeek* file section is full of them, but I had my own idea, and nothing was going to sway my opinion that it was the best idea.

When I was a kid a secondhand bookshop sold *Commando* comics for 10p each, and I grabbed whichever ones had the most interesting covers. The stories within those covers... no idea, they certainly didn't make as much of an impression on me as the covers did.

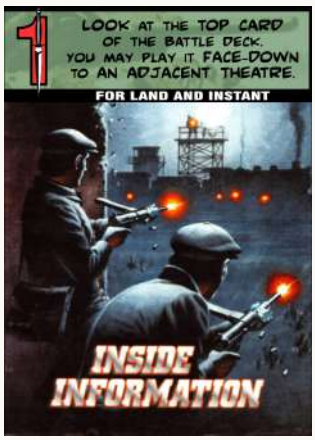
The retheme was slight and obvious, but it just fit so well. It certainly helped that there are thousands of covers to choose from (even with all the reprints), and helps even more that many of their titles are *perfect* for describing the various card abilities.

Digging through all the archives was an absolute blast, and I've already done so again for the upcoming ***Hearts Minds & Enemy Lines***, though I'm basing my search on a photo of the Italian edition of the ***Critters at War*** retheme of it, so I'll need to hang tight and double check all the wording later on before it ever comes close to the printer. I might even see if I can update or improve upon the old files in the meantime, while I think about it.

Nobody I've played it with has that connection to these comics, if they even know about them in the first place, but I do, and it's my copy of the game, so why not go to the effort of truly making it my own before hitting 'Print'?

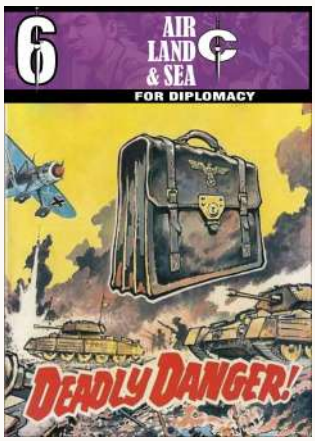
Looking at it splayed out in front of me, should I have called it ***Air Land & ¢***?... It'd need a full reprint if I went down that route, though. Do I really want to give HP that much more money?









# TO YOU

## I HEAR THE BATTLE CRY

Sometimes I wonder why I bother buying two player games with themes like those found in the ***Undaunted*** series, because my partner very likely won't go anywhere near them, leaving me with boxes of unwanted games and no opponent to play them with. So it's a damn good job the ***Undaunted*** games are pretty cheap and have solo modes, so I know what CTD is going on about.

I've stuffed ***Normandy*** and ***North Africa*** into whichever box fit everything (presumably the ***Reinforcements*** box then, but I think I mixed the covers before tossing the leftovers, and it has been a while since I've seen it on the shelf), and I've managed to go through both campaigns albeit only as the Allies in each.

The solo system is a rather involved set of flow charts for each unit which makes it feel a bit procedural but it is trying to simulate the decision making of a human opponent, and that's not exactly easy to distil, even with a structured set of rules defining what is and isn't possible within the game.

CTD also brings up a great point about the fact that player count (and dare I say it, the 'right' players too) is just as important a factor to consider about getting something to the table or not.

I would love to get ***Caverna*** back to the table at a player count higher than 2, despite knowing it'll be a pain to do so, especially with regards to that surface area dimension. Similarly, I want to see ***Keyflower*** played to its full potential once more, and might even consider going through the Hell that is a 6-player ***Age of Steam*** game, where at least 4 players have never played such a title before.

Will any of that ever happen? It has probably been years since I hoped it would...

## "3m OF TABLE? I DON'T EVEN HAVE 3m OF FLOOR!"

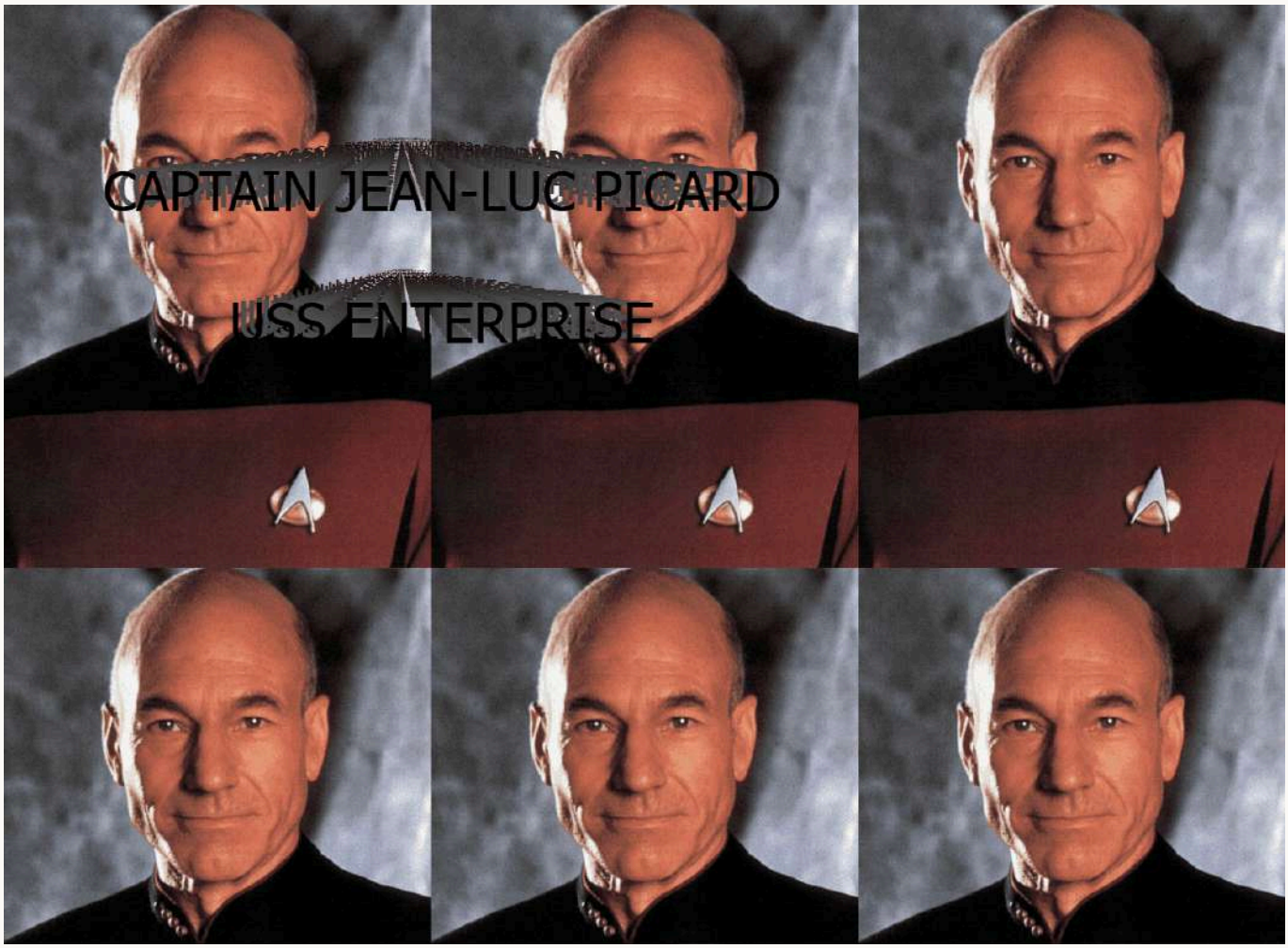
I need some time to recover after Roger's aside. I know exactly what would happen if I somehow found a way to fit such a huge table in this place, and the answer wouldn't be "more/bigger games", hence that ignorable theme.

It can be surprising just how much stuff you need to find space for, not just in space-themed 4X games, but all over the hobby.

We recently dusted off ***Suburbia*** for a two player game, but as I now have the Collector's Edition, you practically have to wade through its components just to uncover the base game. Once you've got the bits you need for whatever variant you're playing, you then have the fun task of deciding where the score track goes, which is itself nearly twice the dimensions of the (large Collector's Edition) box it came in, despite half of it seemingly only ever getting used for game end scoring.

Business card holders and the like are neat when the situation calls for them, absolutely, though I think I've only ever used them for ***Tainted Grail***, as it happens. Most of its decks (the ones you actively draw from, rather than search through) are small enough to fit in the compartments, and the simple notion of not allowing a deck of cards to slide and fan itself out all over the place as time ~~drags on~~ goes by is great. I suppose it's a similar thing with dice trays, but mine are all on the large side.

I should look into ***Compile*** one day. I know next to nothing about it, beyond it being a card game with a techy theme, but I do enjoy a nice head-to-head card game from time to ti– wait a minute. This how to play video seems awfully ***Air Land & Sea***-y. Hmmm. Might just have to look into it a little sooner than 'one day'...




***"Sometimes, Number One, you just have to bow to the absurd."***

***— Cap.tain. Jean.-Luc. Pi.Card. of.the.U.S.S. En.Ter.Prise.***

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# Little Wooden People

Number 7: by Roger BW

- Blog: https://blog.firedrake.org/
- Gaming stuff: https://tekeli.li/
- Rulebooks: https://tekeli.li/rogers-rules/
- Mastodon: https://oldbytes.space/@RogerBW
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## Recent Games

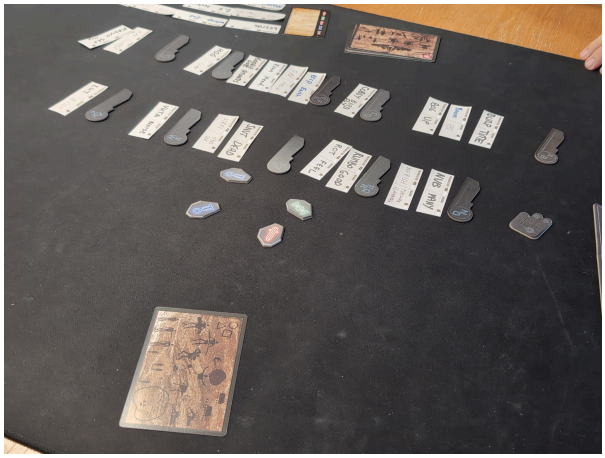
Just before the deadline for #6, I went to the very last ACWest, the Airecon spinoff in Telford. I've made it to all of these since the first one in 2023; they've all been at the Ramada, apart from the venture to the convention centre, notable mostly because the other half of it was being used by some sort of Young Gymnasts venture and the security guards were very good about keeping straight faces as they directed visitors to one or the other. This site works well, with plenty of table space; the only problem is that if you're looking for someone, you have a lot of rooms to look in.






I got in a sadly rare game of Xia: Legends of a Drift System[1] with one experienced and one new player. So as not to take too long, we played to ten points, and while I got a solid early lead nobody was more than a point behind me by the end. We had Wormholes; they collapsed. We had Infection (take damage every time you roll a 1, pass it on to another ship when you're adjacent, clearly Space Herpes). We had one player trying to get the Ice Rock Jockey award, killed by the new player who then scooped the award too. Great stuff.

[1] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/82222



Then Expo acquisition Gibberers[2] (with the English translation pack), in which you're trying to convey increasingly complex ideas in an invented language. I'd played this once before at the Oxford Meeples meetup, when my prevailing impression was "fun stress"; this time it was more relaxed, "a party game for people who don't go to parties". Later I got in a forum game too.

Then recent Kickstarter game The Sheep[3], basically a co-op escort quest as you try to get caravans across the board and defend them from mutant murder sheep (i.e. sheep). I found myself increasingly using lines from *Aliens* ("I only need to know one thing. Where. They. Are.", "Is this a stand-up fight, sir, or another lamb hunt", and "They mostly come at night. Mostly.") which seemed to fit the ethos.




As far as the game itself was concerned, there was an interesting arc of difficulty: it started off fairly easy, got tough in the middle as the caravans spread out, then towards the end as they gathered towards the exit point and left the board we found ourselves all powered up with relatively little to do. Still, good fun if a bit huge; I'll never buy it, but I'll play it again if someone has it.



On to King of Tokyo: Godzilla[4] which is more or less the classic game with the actual named monsters rather than non-trademarked copies—but there are also Evolution cards which give you a unique set of power-ups. I've never *loved* this game but I did have a good time.



[2] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/380109
[3] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/451646
[4] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/463297



I'd been meaning to try the Red Rains cooperative mode of Ashes (Reborn): Rise of the Phoenixborn[5] and we finally got a chance to give it a shot. This feels to me as though it might originally have evolved from a Phoenixborn automatic player, but that may simply be because all the card effects from the rest of the game that are designed to do specific things to other players (not just inflicting damage on them) need to have analogues here. A bit fiddly, but great fun!

(I've been playing this game on and off since original *Ashes* was shut down and sold off cheaply, which was when I bought most of my cards.)



And finally Omens[6], loosely a trick-taker but it's mostly about the special card powers. I rather liked this and may well pick it up at some point.



This was the last ACWest, but the original organiser is planning to carry it on as "Poole Party" without the Airecon banner. Sign up for notification of that here[7].

Back home, I got in some Sentinels of the Multiverse: Definitive Edition[8]. I hear rumours to suggest there may still be more material for this in spite of the collapse of Greater Than Games, which would be good news; in this case it all went horribly wrong, but in a way that suggested that if we'd played better we'd have done better, which is my favourite way to fail a coop game.



At Thirsty Meeples I tried the new Stefan Feld release Medico[9]. Which to me fell firmly into

[5]https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/167400
[6]https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/428787
[7]https://form.jotform.com/262775123786366
[8]https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/335212
[9]https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/472021

the "beige modern Euro" camp: there are things slightly influenced by the theme, but mostly you're collecting tokens to get other tokens to get your score up.

It's all a bit of an abstract point salad. There are some pleasing optimisation puzzles, but if you want something that will give you any idea of the decisions faced by a travelling barber-surgeon in mediaeval Europe, this is not the game for that. I mean, there aren't even any patients! (Oh, as the blurb says you can "heal the city lord and gain his favour", but in game terms that's simply that one of your action options is to pick up a Favour card.) It's all set collection and tactical movement.




All of this is not helped by what is either poor translation or terrible original rules writing. Is selling in the market an action you can take in passing rather than only at your specific destination for the round? Probably, since it's listed under secondary actions, but if so why does it say "at your Destination"? How does Prestige relate to the actual scoring track, if at all? What is the point of the small white meeples, the Medicus' juniors?



There was nothing here to offend me. Stefan Feld is a competent game designer. But there was also nothing here to appeal, to say I should ever play *this* game again rather than any other competently-designed abstract Eurogame. If someone has it at a convention and says "hey Roger, come and play", sure, I'll come and play. But I can't see why I'd ever seek it out, and at the same time I can't see any obsessive Eurogamers deciding that this is *their game* that they will play and get good at to the exclusion of all else (which might be the case for some of Feld's earlier designs such as *The Castles of Burgundy, Trajan* or *Bruges).*

And then I went to Essen. (Essen!) Which I will talk about below. But in terms of the games, what I demoed for Indie Game Studios was:

Accuse![10] in which you're trying to work out which cards are out of play (but rather than just "one of these six" in each case, some of the sets have duplicates). This is by Rikka Tahta, probably best known for *Coup,* and there are all sorts of little enhancements that make it a pleasure to play: for example, when someone makes an accusation, that will trigger the end game, so even if they were wrong and eliminated from the game they don't have long to wait.

[10] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/401225



Oracle[11] was our hot seller, running out on Friday morning. In most respects it's a must-follow trick-taking game, but as well as making a bid on the number of tricks you'll win you must also make a second bid on a random condition (e.g. pick a player who will make their bid, or a player who will win fewest tricks). You don't even win anything: if either bid fails you lose a token, and first to run out of tokens ends the game.



Flash Point: Golden State Heroes[12] was a partly-expected joy. This is the new core box for (non-Legacy) *Flash Point;* it's the same core game, but the specialists (CAFS, Imaging Specialist, etc.) are replaced by named firefighters with their own abilities, which are augmented by Gear cards (choose two from four at game start and they'll last for the whole game) and Boost cards (choose two from three, one-off abilities). There are six maps in the box, each of which has its own event deck so that thematic things will happen, and many of them have special rules (for example live wires that make smoke immediately brew up into fire). Firefighters are more powerful and the fire is harder to beat; there's a separate upgrade pack with event decks for each of the original game's maps, and firefighter upgrades for the original specialists. I loved it. (And I think the last copy went less than half an hour before the end of the show.)



## Essen Spiel and other conventions

My first was in 2012 and I've been back most years since. By now I recognise the cycle: a month out, I'm thinking that I don't buy that much any more, I can get most games I want in England, a place to stay is ferociously expensive. But by the end of the show, I'm booking a place to stay for next year, and if they asked me to sign up on the spot to work the next four days as well, I'd be on it like a shot.

I increasingly see conventions as being sales-first or play-first: i.e. do people come there to buy, or to play games. I think that as a show gets bigger, if it doesn't deliberately choose the play-first path, money will move in and it will become a sales show (as happened to UK Games Expo, which fair enough was always somewhat about the selling, but now that it's paying for the

[11] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/475410
[12] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/446610

NEC it's absolutely reliant on that). Obviously my taste is play-first, and I turn up in most places with my Rolling Games Library, a camping trolley full of games I want to play. Spiel is sales-first, with no playing space allotted at all; but somehow it doesn't feel to me like the desperate scrabble for money that is Expo.

That may be because I tend to hang around in the "expert and hobby games" (as opposed to "family games") sections; there are plenty of simpler games I like to play, but the thing I find at Spiel that I don't anywhere else is the little guys, the designer-publishers who've scraped together all their money to present a game that I'll never hear of again. Sometimes it's forgettable; sometimes it's a gem.

And by now the venue has resonances for me too. That red stained-glass tree at the end of the Galleria that says "yeah, you really are back here for another Spiel". The currywurst vendors. The miniature railway in the Grugapark on the other side of the fence. The guy with the second-hand SF and fantasy book stand (all in German, but a kindred spirit). The ravens who hang around the courtyards in hope of dropped chips or, rumour has it, cigarette ends.

I still do UK Games Expo mostly because I have a long-term relationship with Wotan Games and enjoy demoing for them (and because a whole bunch of people I like to see don't go to any other conventions that I go to); last year after a very hot and crowded few days I was thinking hard about whether to come back, but a rather more pleasant last day and some fine evenings got me in again. The other shows I go to are definitely play-first: I've been to every Airecon since 2017, including the West and North-West spinoffs, though the last one is coming up in March. Stabcon continues to be good fun (tiny, twice a year in Stockport). And after many years of thinking about it, I finally decided to go to Tabletop Scotland… in 2020. But I've been to each one since they restarted in 2022, and I'll admit that part of *that* is because I enjoy driving, and it gives me an excuse to stop at places like Tebay Services and the Moffat Toffee Shop en route. (Also the really good fish and chip shop next to the hotel I favour on the other side of the Forth.)

## We Also Heard From

*Comments on OdaM number 6*

**Matt Elliott:** While my wife (uninterested in gaming) is very forgiving of my table use, I still don't feel entirely happy about leaving games set up. Unreasonable of me I know. (Before the next issue, she's going away for a few days, and I have Plans.)

I'd say *"Tainted Grail* doesn't sound like fun", but I can see the appeal of a mechanistic game/task like this - over on *Ever & Anon* I'm solo RPGing a free trader captain in the *2300AD* setting because, well, mostly because I'm curious to see if it can be made to pay in a rather more primitive setting than *Traveller.* (So far, yes, just about.) That needs a lot of rules from different places, at least four different books to be cross-checked, but I'm still having fun with it.

Your menhir problem shows off why Hexes are the Best Shape. (And you can even do them with square tiles, just offset each row half a square from the previous one.)

I think the "fuzzy table talk" rules game that annoyed me most was *Bandido* where you're trying to cooperate to lay cards that block off all the escape routes, but…

"Since *Bandido* is a cooperative game, players should discuss the best way to proceed, but beware, you're not allowed to show your cards to the other players directly." (Bandido Rules)

So what *can* you say? Presumably not something that would be equivalent to showing your card,

like “I have a card with exits 2, 4 and 5 open”. But…?

What I like about *Tabletop Simulator* is the same thing that a lot of people don’t like: it doesn’t enforce the rules, or anything else. It gives you a simulated table with cards and dice and things, it has some tools to compensate for the imperfection of the simulation (like a space for “your hand” where you can see the contents but nobody else can), but otherwise it’s up to you to make a game work. (Some individual game implementations add rules support, but it’s not the default.) I think BGA does a better job of being BGA with the whole “you cannot make an illegal move” thing, and I’ve played more there, but I’ve had more *fun* with TTS.

I’ve played *Hit Z Road* once. It had nothing to say to me. But I don’t think I’ve ever really enjoyed a Martin Wallace game; it’s not that I think he’s bad at what he does, but he’s aiming for things that aren’t what I want.

I note that the cost of a 1″ thin metal disc to go under a miniature somehow never gets above 2p. Funny, that. My wife gave me a box of old halfpennies, which I sometimes use, but I also got some Illuminati Coins cheaply when I was still demonstrating for Steve Jackson Games and they’ve become my standard extra game currency mostly because they are *really legible* on the reverse.



As I said to CTD last time, Inkscape is a great tool for shoving stuff around the screen (and zooming in and out) while keeping each bit of stuff as its own distinct entity. I tend to use it for the *Rallyman* challenges, for example, moving my car marker around the imported track PDF.

**Christopher Taylor-Davies:** I’ve looked at gaming tables, but the one I have already is big enough, nice and solid from Ikea, and since I don’t really have a need to put food on top of a game in progress (what about spillage?) I’m happy to stick with that, with the “mouse mats” I mentioned last time.

I believe the canonical first strategy-deity game was *Populous* in 1989.

Thinking of *War of the Ring,* when I bought A War of Whispers[13] the crowdfund had an option: either cubes for the armies, and card pieces for towers, towns and farms, or flashy plastic bits for all. I didn’t like that, so I got the cubes; then I 3d-printed my own plastic bits for the non-army elements. The result is a game just a little unlike anyone else’s copy, that makes the board easy to read (“what colour is that non-army thing right now” is a constant question, and changing the piece to a different colour makes it easier to see than tagging the standard piece with a small coloured element) and that doesn’t have fiddly little plastic soldiers with flags. (The models for the cities and towers actually came from the Tabletop Simulator mod supplied by the publisher, though I found a better hut model when it came to the farms.)

[13] https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/253499



The card-modifying game I've played is *Mystic Vale* (also by Clair). Neat idea, makes a change in deckbuilding terms from chucking away your boring starting cards to make room for the nifty new ones, but I confess I wasn't grabbed by the rest of the play.

I've played a little *Memoir '44* but I think I'm too much of a wargamer to be happy with this boardgame version. It's that old abstraction gap again: I have some idea of the decisions a field commander faces, and "you only have these cards to choose from" feels too synthetic to make me happy.