

The journal of innovative
gaming

ENCOUNTER

Mar/Apr 1983

Special C.E. Issue



the **science** fiction game
for everyone!

\$2.

Eon Products Inc, publisher Jack Kittredge, editor

RFD#2, Sheldon Rd, Barre MA 01005

News from Home

The first issue of this modest publication seems to have been well received, and I appreciate the effort those of you took who wrote in reactions, comments, and suggestions. This kind of feedback is very helpful and can keep ENCOUNTER relevant to serious gamers' interests. We're always looking for articles, graphics, or other material from our readers concerning any clever new games, game variants, OI gaming news which might be of interest to game players generally. So keep us in mind when you try out a new title or think up a new strategy. It could well be you have something valuable to say to a lot of other players.

We've been busy here getting out the new box for COSMIC ENCOUNTER (these things always seem to take longer than is reasonable). Since we've never been very happy with the CE box (it's pretty hard to capture that game in one picture) we kind of fell into a practice of changing covers with each new edition. That isn't very smart from a business point of view (costly, destroys market identification, and all those sorts of things) but it does keep artists employed and lets us feel we're slowly moving in the right direction. Anyway, the new cover, by noted artist Dean Morrissey, is a stunning view of the first meeting between the Clones & the Vulches. We're all very pleased with it. The cover of this issue is a black & white copy of Morrissey's painting. I hope you like it, too.

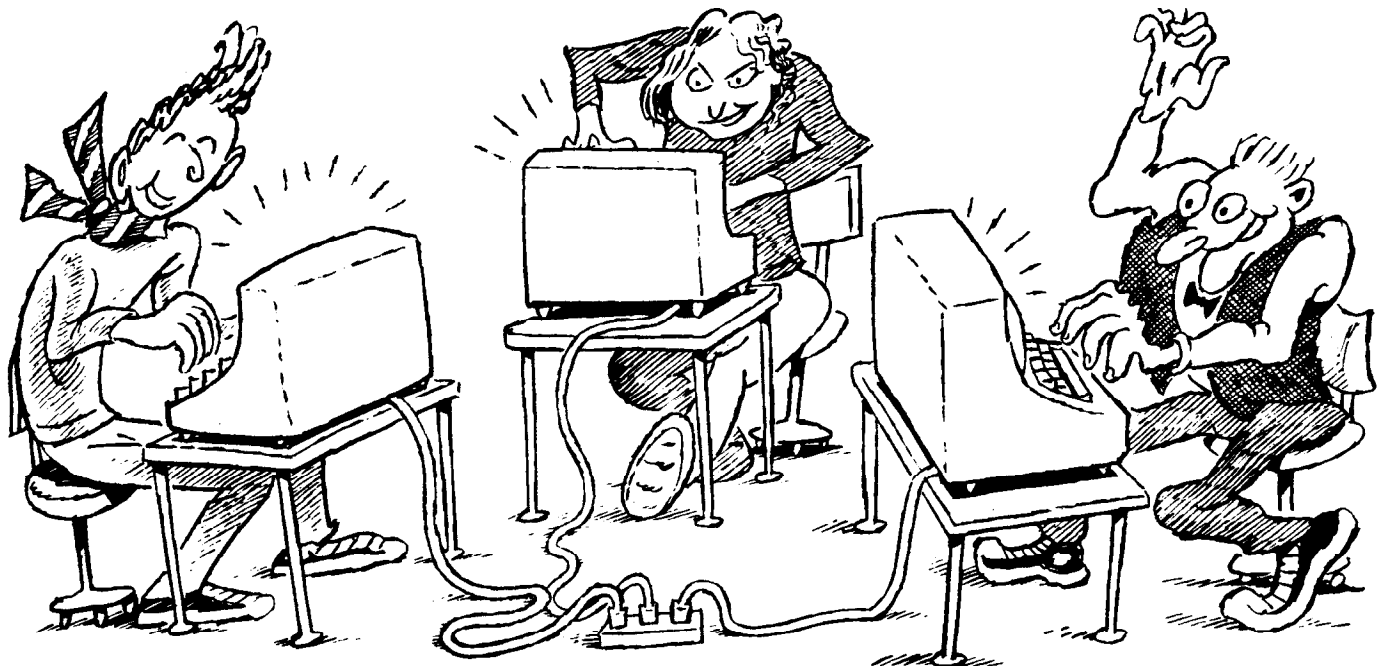
Other exciting news for us here is that we have been asked by a video-game design outfit to try our hand at a pretty challenging assignment: designing computer games which are truly multi-player and stra-

tegic. It seems that just about everything on the market in the way of a computer or video game is primarily either player vs. machine or for at most two players—with both players competing to best each other at essentially the same task. Much of the current video fare also seems to be based on physical dexterity and coordination, with strategy clearly taking the back seat. While this sort of stuff can be a lot of fun—even addicting—for us it lacks the element of social interaction which is what makes gaming so interesting and rewarding.

Thus we'll be spending some of our time learning about bits and bytes, floppy discs and CPUS. Being somewhat old-fashioned board-gamers, growing up with Monopoly and chess, graduating to bridge and poker, and learning about the real world through Risk, this new technology is a little mysterious and awesome. But it obviously offers tremendous opportunities for depth, surprise, and player communication far beyond anything possible with most board games. So the challenge is there, and as computers are going to be with us increasingly in the years to come we figure people might as well have something valuable and fun to do with them in their family or group.

I'll keep you posted how it's going!

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LETTERS

from Ed Day, Williston Park, NY:

I have enjoyed **COSMIC ENCOUNTER** very much. In the short time since I started playing I got all the expansions for it. There is one question which I could have prevented the need to ask if I had used some forethought. What is the card count that should be in a complete deck including the expansions? In the original rules there was such a list for the basic game, but afterwards there was no such list provided with the expansion notes. Now I will never know if I have lost any of the cards. So, if you could, please give me a complete listing of all the cards (Attack, Kicker, Edict & Compromise) in a deck of **COSMIC ENCOUNTER**.

Editor: An excellent question. It would have been very helpful to include the card count with the expansion notes not only to see what might be lost, but also to let players know what might be waiting for them out there as a game begins. Excluding Flares and blank cards, a CE complete deck should include the following:

Attack Cards

from the basic deck:	30 (1)	(12) 4
	20 (2)	10 (6)
	18 (1)	8 (8)
	15 (2)	6 (8)
	14 (2)	4 (2)
from Set #3:	17 (1)	9 (2)
	13 (1)	7 (1)
from Set #8:	40 (1)	7 (3)
	16 (1)	5 (2)
	15 (2)	1 (1)
	12 (1)	

Compromise Cards

from the basic deck:	10
from Set #3:	1
from Set #8:	4

Edicts

From the basic deck:	Plague (1)
	Stellar Gas (1)
	Force Field (1)

Emotion Control (1)
 Mobius Tubes (2)
 cosmic Zap (2)
 Rebirth (1)
 Timegash (1)
 Victory Boon (1)
 Un-Zap (1)
 Finder (1)
 Keeper (1)
 Slulity (1)
 Warp Break (1)
 Flare Zap (1)

from Set #3:

from Set X8:

Kickers

from Set #8:	3 (1)
	2 (3)
	0 (1)

Altogether this is 89 cards, so start counting.

From Ray&Kate Ball, Ocoee, FL:

Just received *our* first copy of **ENCOUNTER**. As a happy coincidence we have a **CE** session scheduled for this evening. We are fanatically devoted to **CE** and have enjoyed *all* of your other games as well. There isn't a game of **CE** that goes by without one or more arguments ensuing. Here is the latest: The Witch cast a spell changing all Flares into Kicker **0's**. During the duration of the spell a player ran out of Challenge Cards, forcing her to discard her Flares and Edicts and draw a new hand. One of the cards to be discarded was the Loser Flare. Should that be discarded as a Kicker 0 or should the Flare instructions (discard into another player's hand) be followed? Will you sell some blank deck cards so we can add the new powers' Flares listed in the first issue of **ENCOUNTER** without it being obvious? How much?

Editor: I'm glad you like the new powers in the first issue. Blank cards are now available for 10 cents each (plus \$1 for postage) in any quantity. As you probably know, a permanent ink marker works best on their slick surface. Set #9 will be out this summer, and we'll know exactly when as the time gets nearer. On the Flare/Kicker, it's a Kicker and should be discarded as such until the spell is cast. Happy playing!

From Michael F. Richards, Reading PA:

One-on Moon 678, the Big Bang, does Lucre count towards the total? Taken literally, we decided it does "...offensive and defensive totals. . ." not tokens. Right?

Two-on Insect Super Power, if implemented, a player may make (that is, force) his opponent to use his power first or second, but once committed to that action, the player himself *must* use his opponent's power, he cannot watch the outcome and then change his mind halfway through. True or False? (This interpretation is taken from Pennsylvania statute based on Hunter vs. Feifer, a landmark decision based on Hunter's vasclating use of Insect Super Power against Mr. Feifer's confused Laser.)

Three-when do I get the new, improved box I ordered? I suppose all these questions and more will be answered in the inaugural edition of the newsletter.

Editor: Sorry we missed the first issue for you, Mike. Hope this gets to you soon enough to settle out of court. By the way, have a little respect, will ya! This isn't just a newsletter. It's a Journal.

On your questions, they're good ones, all three. Real good. Hmm. On whether or not Lucre can precipitate the Big Bang, I'd say not. This is because the Moon itself specifies that the word 'total' refers to "cards and tokens" and, by spelling it out, excludes other later additions which do not affect either of these. A buttressing of this interpretation can be found

in the Lucre rules, namely that Lucre is added to the total "after all powers, etc. affecting the total are used." Since the Big Bang affects the total by throwing all the tokens in the Warp, and it is certainly an 'etc.', this seems to confirm the view that a Big Bang determination should be made prior to the addition of Lucre.

On the Insect Power, I'd hate to argue it against a Philadelphia lawyer, but I think the Super Insect has total flexibility. If he wants to go first, no problem. He flashes the Flare and goes ahead. If he wants to go second, he simply waits for his opponent to go first (flashing the Flare if he is offensive player and would normally go first) and then follows him. Even if the opponent doesn't use his power when he has the chance, the Super Insect can then go ahead and use it anyway since it is still 'before' his opponent has used his power. Finally, the Super Insect isn't forced to use the power if his opponent does and the Insect has declared he will do so afterwards. The Flare specifies he 'may' use the power and affects only the timing of his option, not his free will to decide. (Besides, it's more fun that way and you don't get to be a Super Insect very often.)

On the confounded box, please don't sue. We moved our warehouse and are going with a new, local boxmaker. I guess we haven't learned how to interpret his cryptic delivery commitments yet. Anyway, hopefully it'll go out with this issue. If not, shortly thereafter (before the end of February-blush).



From Ed Kleban, Arm Arbor, MI:

Here's a power designed by Dave Woodcock and Ed Kleban, inspired by Mark Miller and Douglas Hofstadter. **The Moderator**

You have the power of moderation. When you are not a main player, you may announce "moderation" before challenge cards are revealed. You must then play an attack card face down, which is revealed along with the main player's challenge cards. If either opponent plays a compromise card, no moderation occurs. Otherwise the player of the attack card with the moderate value wins. If the moderator plays the attack card of moderate value ~~or ties with either opponent's card,~~ then the moderator decides which main opponent wins the challenge, and must discard the card played. The moderator keeps cards played in this manner which are not of moderate value.

Do not use in a two-player game.

Wild: Before challenge cards are played, you may permit the main player with the lesser number of cards to draw from his opponent's hand until he has at least as many cards as his opponents. Play only once per challenge.

Super: You may announce "moderation" as a main player and play a moderation card in addition to your challenge card. You must announce which card is the moderation card before cards are revealed.

Editor: This one sounds powerful but subtle, Ed. A couple of suggestions-how about letting the moderator choose whether or not to take both 'immoderate' cards or not. I think that would make you more likely to use it regularly. Secondly, the Super power allows the moderator to automatically declare himself the winner of a challenge in which both cards he played were the same. Either his cards must always be different values, or his effect is voided in case of a tie. One or the other of these rules should be adopted for the Super Moderator to make it balance properly, I think. Thanks for a great idea.

From Gary Huckabay, Half Moon Bay, CA:

1) If you have a Super Flare (e.g. Void) and you want to use the Wild Flare, can you Cosmic Zap your own power to use it? *Editor: You sure can.*

2) If you make an attack via the Demon Wild Flare, and a Victory Boon edict is played, are all the players rewarded? *Editor: No, just the defensive player picked.*

3) Can you declare a moon filthy via the Filth Flare or Super Filth? *Editor: The Filth Flare specifies that the Wild Filth only works on planets, but the Super Filth can be used against planets or moons.*

4) Can a moon be occupied by more than one person (via the Bully)? *Editor: No, the Moon rules specify that never can a Moon be occupied by more than one player. The Bully specifies that tokens he doesn't select on 'planets' can remain, and he can co-occupy. But Moons require a full removal of the losing defen-*

sive player because of the rule forbidding co-occupancy of Moons.

5) Can the Terrorist bomb Moons, and if so do the moons take effect first? *Editor: No, the power card refers only to planets which can be mined with bombs, not Moons.*

6) What will the Aristocrat power consist of, and when will that Expansion Set be out? *Editor: The Aristocrat will be in Expansion Set #9, due out in the summer of 1983. This will round out the powers to a full 75, so we included its flare in Set #8—in anticipation of its publication. The rest of Set #9 will be totally different, but I can't divulge any more details about it now. Wait and see.*

7) Does the Wild Pacifist stop the Machine? *Editor: It sure does.*

8) Can the Wild Magnet stop an opponent from playing an Edict, Flare, or Kicker? *Editor: You bet.*

9) New Moon-NOMAD. This moon has been used extensively by us, and we find it really adds spice to any game. The Moon, which is continuous, moves in the same manner as Moon Wraith. When it lands, however, the tokens which occupied the Moon get off and gain that base, and the tokens which were on the planet go on to NOMAD. When hitting a blank planet, the tokens get off of the Moon, and the Moon can then again be attacked. *Editor: It sounds as if it might be pretty interesting, Gary. I can see games being won or lost on this one. It does, however, have the potential of letting several players co-occupy a Moon at the same time, which is expressly forbidden by the Moon rules (and for very good reasons). Can you think of a way to avoid this?*

GROUP ENCOUNTER

New Aliens for Multiple-Power Games

Allen Vamey, of Stanford, CA has sent in 6 ideas for Aliens especially adapted to that world of conundrum, paradox, and logical loop-de-loop: multiple-power CE. We have long shied away from trying to give definition to that world, but Allen's ideas seem manageable and sound like a lot of fun. Good luck.

What devoted COSMIC ENCOUNTER player doesn't enjoy a multiple-power game? And what player wouldn't lunge for a set of six new powers, custom-designed for multiple-alien play? Well, get ready to lunge...

1. GENE

You have the power of heredity. In a multiple-power game, when you are a main player and you win the challenge (or make a deal), you inherit one of your opponent's powers (his choice) and use it as your own from then on. If you lose the challenge (or fail to deal), you must give the Gene power to your opponent.

History: Itself only a mechanism of heredity, the Gene envies those beings which have achieved inde-



pendent existence. It spitefully steals away abilities, even knowing it must inevitably pass them on to a new recipient.

2. ZEPHYR

You have the power to gust. At the start of your own challenge you may declare that you are "gusting." You pass this power to the player on your right, and each other player passes one of his powers (his choice) to the player on his right. Each player now uses the new power as his own.

History: The Zephyr delights in its mischievous psychic windstorms, which frequently waft alien intelligences into unexpected new bodies. Though this is quite a blow to its victims, it is noncorporeal and thus easily maintains its breezy manner.

3. LEECH

You have the power to leech. You begin the game with no powers, except this one. When you are a main player, before the cone is pointed you take from your opponent one power of your choice, using it as your own from then on. When you reach the number of powers the other players started the game with, you then must give your opponent one of the powers you already have if you want to leech another one from him.

History: In the shallow, fetid seas of its home world, the Leech compensated for its slow start in evolution by learning to acquire the characteristics of its predators. Now it is extending its tendrils of influence in order to draw off the life-blood of the Cosmos.

4. CHAMELEON

You have the power of *metamorphosis*. At the start of your challenge, you may draw a new power, at

any one turn than you started the game with. At the beginning of each turn, you must decide which of the powers you have to select from are activated this turn. The others are turned face down, and cannot be used until you activate them in a later turn.

History: The Chameleons found their own forms so loathsome that they developed their shapeshifting powers in self-defense. Constantly broadening their range, they hope to encompass all possible forms, not only ruling the Cosmos but impersonating it.

5. SPONGE

You have the power to *absorb*. When your bases in your home system are occupied by opponents in a successful challenge, your tokens do not go to the Warp but instead remain on the planet with the attackers. Conversely, when you establish a new base, defending tokens there are not removed to the Warp but coexist with you.

History: Believing in peaceful coexistence with other life-forms, the Sponge nevertheless wishes to soak up the entire Cosmos in its immortal structure and wring from it every drop of experience.

DO NOT USE WITH THE FILTH.

6. ZAPPER

You have the power of *nullification*. You start the game with one "zap point." As a main player or ally, when you win a challenge or deal, you lose a point; when you lose a challenge or fail to deal, you get a point. You can spend your points to Zap another player's power(s), one point per Zap. If you are Zapped you still keep the point you were going to spend.

History: A hive-mind that depends for survival on absolute order, the Zapper competes for Cosmic domination on the condition that everyone "plays by the

Is This How They Do it Down Under?

Game enthusiast David **Forres**, of Victoria, Australia has sent in an ingenious idea for adding strategic and tactical variables to COSMIC ENCOUNTER. I thought a number of ENCOUNTER readers might like to try out his idea and let us know what you think. What follows is all by David.

Satellites and Space Stations

David Forres

Satellites and Space Stations introduce a purely logistic operation, which by tactical deployment can give players a distinct strategic advantage. Their inclusion encourages alliances between players and enhances the two-player game.

At the start of the game, each player receives as many satellites as players in the game and half as many (rounded up) space stations.

During a player's turn, *instead of the normal challenge*, a player may deploy 1 or 2 satellites or 1 space station *within the destined (or Dictated) system*.

Each planet can support a maximum of 3 satellites. Each system can support a maximum of 3 space stations.

Each satellite costs 2 lucre to launch.

Each space station costs 3 lucre to launch.

Each satellite is deployed in orbit around any one planet.

Space stations are placed anywhere within the hex space.

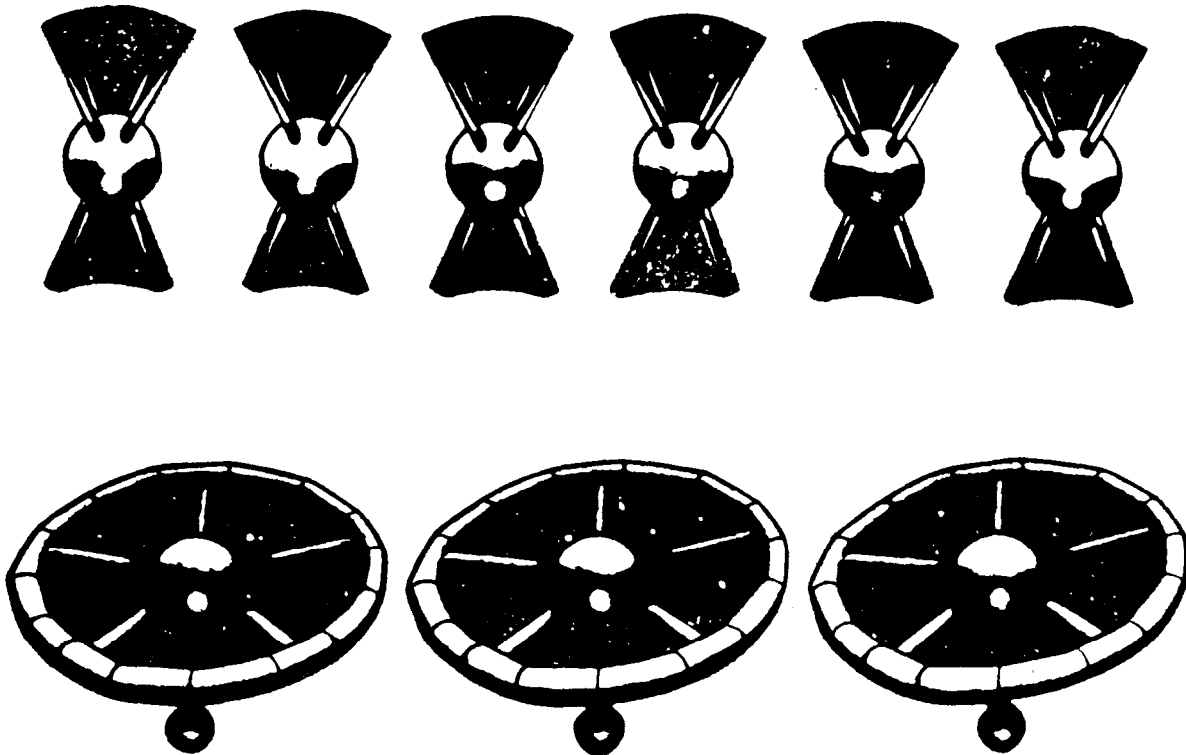
Satellites affect only the planet around which they are in orbit and have the effect of plus 2 tokens.

Space stations affect all planets and moons within the same system and have the effect of plus 1 token.

During any one specific challenge, satellites and space stations may be deployed offensively or defensively by a main player or ally at the player's discretion.

Satellites and space stations may be recovered at no cost by players at the conclusion of any challenge but, if deployed again, must be relaunched. Satellites and space stations may be recovered by main players as part of a 'deal'.

Satellites and space stations can only be destroyed by missile attack or meteorite storm, (Edicts), and Meteorite Moon or Comet Crash, (Moons). Satellites may also be destroyed by the Terrorist's bombs.



Satellites and Space Stations: one player's set of playing pieces

Some notes about Satellites and Space Stations:

1) With their inclusion, the game for the first time becomes strategic, and not just 'role-playing simulation', as by careful deployment and timing of launching one can gain distinct tactical advantages.

2) They encourage alliances between players, which is the one single factor which makes CE such a "fun" game. Alliances are only temporary and immediate arrangements, and due to this are constantly shifting, unlike other games in which an alliance is binding (such as DUNE) and as such is a commitment which requires careful consideration before reaching agreement.

3) They enhance the two-player game, in which there are no alliances possible.

4) The disadvantage of being unable to acquire a Super Flare if one is an Alien whose advantage is a Lucre-income is now offset because one can convert an economic advantage into a tactical, winning advantage. (The acquisition of resources does not, in itself, win the game: the win is dependent on the application and use of those resources.)

5) The recovery of launched satellites and space stations at no additional cost introduces another option for reaching "deals", which is the other "fun" aspect of the game. (A serious player would rather wait out the one-minute time limit and lose three men to the warp than grant an adversary a base!)

Some notes on rules:

1) After careful consideration, I have found the optimum number of satellites and space stations available to be a factor of the number of players.

2) After play-testing, the launch cost and attack/defense values of 2 Lucre, 2 tokens on 1 planet; and 3 Lucre, 1 token on 5 planets and 2 moons, for satellites and space stations respectively are realistic and work well.

Some comments on satellites and space stations and their effects on other aspects of the game:

1) One can ignore the last point of the Lucre rules, which states that 'accrued Lucre can be added to a player's total in a challenge.' This complicates things unnecessarily, and it is more realistic for an economic advantage to be converted into a tactical advantage by strategic and intelligent logistic use before benefits are realized.

2) One can increase the acquisition of Lucre from 1 to 2 Lucre, as with the spending options being: (a) reviving tokens, (b) buying cards, (c) making "deals", and (d) launching satellites and space stations. Lucre now becomes a valuable asset and one must plan, budget and save carefully.

3) Note: Satellites and space stations remain unaffected by the outcome of a challenge and can only be destroyed by Edicts and Moons. The additional Edicts pose a realistic threat to satellites and space stations and they "work" in two different ways: Missile Attack is a logistic operation, and therefore must be played at the start of a challenge. Missiles have limited range and must be targeted. Therefore they are limited to destroying one satellite or space station within the player's own Solar System. Meteorite Storm is a natural phenomenon and therefore can be played at any time (like the "Plague"). However, it is indiscriminate and non-selective, destroying all satellites and space stations within any one Solar System. Thus, a player may have to destroy his own satellites or space stations in order to eliminate a potential threat.

I have also included two moons, "Comet Crash" and "Meteorite Moon" as a potential threat to satellites and space stations. They "work" in a similar manner to the Edicts.



EDICT

MISSILE ATTACK

DESTROY ANY ONE
SATELLITE OR SPACE
STATION, WITHIN
YOUR OWN SYSTEM.

PLAY AT THE START
OF YOUR CHALLENGE.



EDICT

METEORITE STORM

DESTROY ALL SATEL-
LITES AND SPACE
STATIONS, WITHIN
ANY ONE SYSTEM.

PLAY AT ANY TIME.

The Cosmic Chronicles

A case study in game design and marketing

Many people have expressed an interest in the origins of COSMIC ENCOUNTER, and how it came to be what it is. We've told the story many times to individuals, but I thought it might be helpful to put it down in black and white-it is, fortunately or not, a fairly typical case study in how a game is originated, developed, and finally put on the market. I hope fledgling designers and game trivia buffs alike will find something here of value.

Cosmic owes its design and development to 4 persons, Bill Eberle, Jack Kittredge, Bill Norton, and Peter Olotka. We came together in the early seventies on Cape Cod. If anything in our case is unusual, it is that we began to work fairly early as a group. There was no single dominant personality, and each of us had an effective veto on what everyone did. While the development of this relationship was often difficult (and it deserves its own story) it has stood us in very good stead for the long haul-providing emotional support and solidarity through what proved to be many ups and downs. Although one of us, Bill Norton, left in 1978, the other three have remained and still serve as the backbone of our humble operations. I dwell on this because many people seem interested in "Who came up with this idea?" or "Who made that decision?". In our case it's really true: We don't know. Each of us will gladly claim credit for the bulk of all the good ideas involved (as well as point the finger for the bad), but in truth we can only work effectively together, snowballing an idea around and around among us until it is large and full enough to make something of.

All of us had in common a fascination with science fiction, and an interest in games. Being in our mid-twenties then we had some extra time and often spent it playing Risk late into the evening, discussing our favorite s.f. books, and the like. I'm sure you've been there.

One day an article in the paper appeared about the current game sensation: The Godfather Game. Making hay on the great Brando flick which was popular then, the game was essentially "Go" themed around crime syndicates controlling 'turf'. And it came in a violin-shaped box! But what caught our eye was the fact that it was all done by a few guys much like us.

Here was a challenge! We'd added a few house rules to Risk which made it a better game and were sure (as are all science fiction readers, I think) that we were plenty smart. Why couldn't we design a game? There wasn't any s.f. game on the market, and look at all those bookstores expanding their science fiction sections every month. Didn't that prove there was a ready buying public waiting for the right game? (Little did we think about the fact that reading is essentially a solitary activity, while gaming requires a group. Perhaps selling group activities to individuals who prefer to be alone is not an instant route to success.) Not all of us were convinced right away that we could come up

with a good science fiction game, but slowly the group came together around designing the game.

At first a couple of us made lists of what we didn't like in games and ruled those features out: no one could lose early and leave the game, there would be no dice and no hop-hop around a board. Then we thought about what would happen when two Alien species meet each other. Well, they could fight, or they could try to talk. Thus was born the Attack/Compromise interaction. Next we considered what we always wanted to do in a game: look at the other guy's cards, have pieces which never get taken off the board, be super-strong. So the Alien powers developed. Since it would be playable by up to 6 people, we came up with 6 powers and stopped. Figuring the game was done, we made some models and started trying to sell it.

Since Parker Brothers made Risk, we figured they would be the logical people to buy our game-then called the Universe Game. Through a relative who had some business deals with Parker we wangled an introduction and went up there with our model. At this point the Universe Game consisted of a deck of Attack & Compromise cards, a few Edicts (then the Cosmic Zap was power-specific, e.g. the Vaccine which could stop the Virus), 6 Alien-specific planet systems made out of tinker toys, egg-cartons, & lots of Elmer's glue, a plastic wine glass warp, and a bunch of Alien-specific tokens (nuts & bolts for the Machine). The six powers were the Machine (what's now the Insect), the Diplomat (what's now the Empath), the Virus (still the same), the Crystal (now the Zombie), the Mind (still the same), and the Plant (since eliminated because its power was that of proximity-if it could touch your planet with its vines, it got a free base).

Needless to say, Parker took one look at it and said "bring it back when it's two-dimensional." Since we figured part of its charm was that it really looked Alien, and we had never thought of how one might produce such a monstrosity, we said "no, we're leaving it here, as it is." A few weeks later their new products man called and said "everybody that comes in my office wants to know what that box of things is. Come up and teach us how to play it. ' "

Thus ensued several years of a back and forth relationship with Parker-they were fascinated with the ideas there, but had no idea how to produce it or market it. It just didn't fit what they did. We kept making a little change here and there, fighting it every time but slowly adding pace, balance, clarity, and ease of production. By the end of a series of trips back and forth over several years, we had added alliances, designed the cone to focus play, standardized the planet systems, put in a color coded die to determine whom you could challenge, changed the Plant's power (we made it what's now called the Mutant) and generally spiffed it up.

Finally Parker decided it was ready. They bought the game license, we signed a contract for royalties, and then we threw a big party. It was going to be Parker's big Christmas release and we were assured of success

Well, as you may have guessed, it didn't turn out that way. About six months later we got a brief call from them saying they weren't going to do it and we should come get the game. Mystified, we rushed up to see what went wrong. "We were all excited", they said, "and did a great prototype to show our sales force. But they turned it down. They said 'space won't sell.' " (This was a year before *Star Wars* came out.) We asked to look at the prototype, and they hauled out this Risk-sized box. On the cover were what looked like several plastic ashtrays. Sure enough, inside were six plastic ashtrays and a lot of little plastic gears, leaves, polyhedrons, and the like. No pictures of Aliens, no stars, no feel of speculation or adventure. We couldn't understand how they could have botched it so badly. Here they were, the biggest game company in the country, and the rules didn't make sense, the game was ugly, and they were scared of tapping an obviously large and expanding market because it was new and different.

Then we got mad. The next weekend we took off and designed the game the way it should have been done: modular hexes for planets and warp, rules on the cards and powers instead of the rule book, full color graphics, general Edicts instead of Alien-specific ones, Alien histories, and, for spite, 29 more Alien powers. We took it back, in a box with the Andromeda galaxy on the front, and said: "Here. This is what it's supposed to be like." But our moment has passed and they were no longer interested in talking.

But now that we knew what it was supposed to look like, we had new vigor. We made appointments with a half a dozen game companies to show the game and took it on the road to publishers most of the next year. Always the reaction was the same. "Well that certainly looks interesting and different, but lets look at that tic-tat-toe variant you designed, instead." (By this point we had designed a dozen other games and were trying to hawk those as well.) Somehow, nobody wanted to take a chance on something as unusual as COSMIC ENCOUNTER.

Finally, in desperation, we started thinking about producing it ourselves. (I remember walking into game stores during this period and almost crying. I could see customers pouring over the shelves looking for something new, something challenging, something fun. I knew what they were looking for, and where it was. I just couldn't figure out how to get it to them.) The problem, of course, was that no one had any money.

We thought about borrowing, but no one wanted to go that much into debt without being pretty sure we could get out again. So we decided to put it to a test. We'd make a bunch of models, go to the next science fiction convention, grab some tables, and declare a game fest. If, after 3 days and nights, people still wanted to play, we would figure we had a winner and go into hock for it.

So, in the Spring of 1977 Bill, who was living in upstate New York then, went to the Syracuse s.f. convention. And the next week we all went to the Boston convention. The reaction was fantastic. We had 4 or 5 games going all the time, night and day, for 3 days.

People wouldn't leave. We'd pry them out of a chair and they would stand and watch the next game. Then they'd bring their friends to watch. It was a sensation.

And sitting in one chair was a tall skinny kid we couldn't evict short of out-right rudeness. He was studying the game and the players more than playing himself. We began to get paranoid. "Oh no, a spy from Milton Bradley. They're gonna steal it" was all we could think. After a while he approached us and said: "Are you going to publish this game?" We hemmed a bit and- said we were thinking of it, but. . . "How would you like an investor?" he asked, offhandedly.

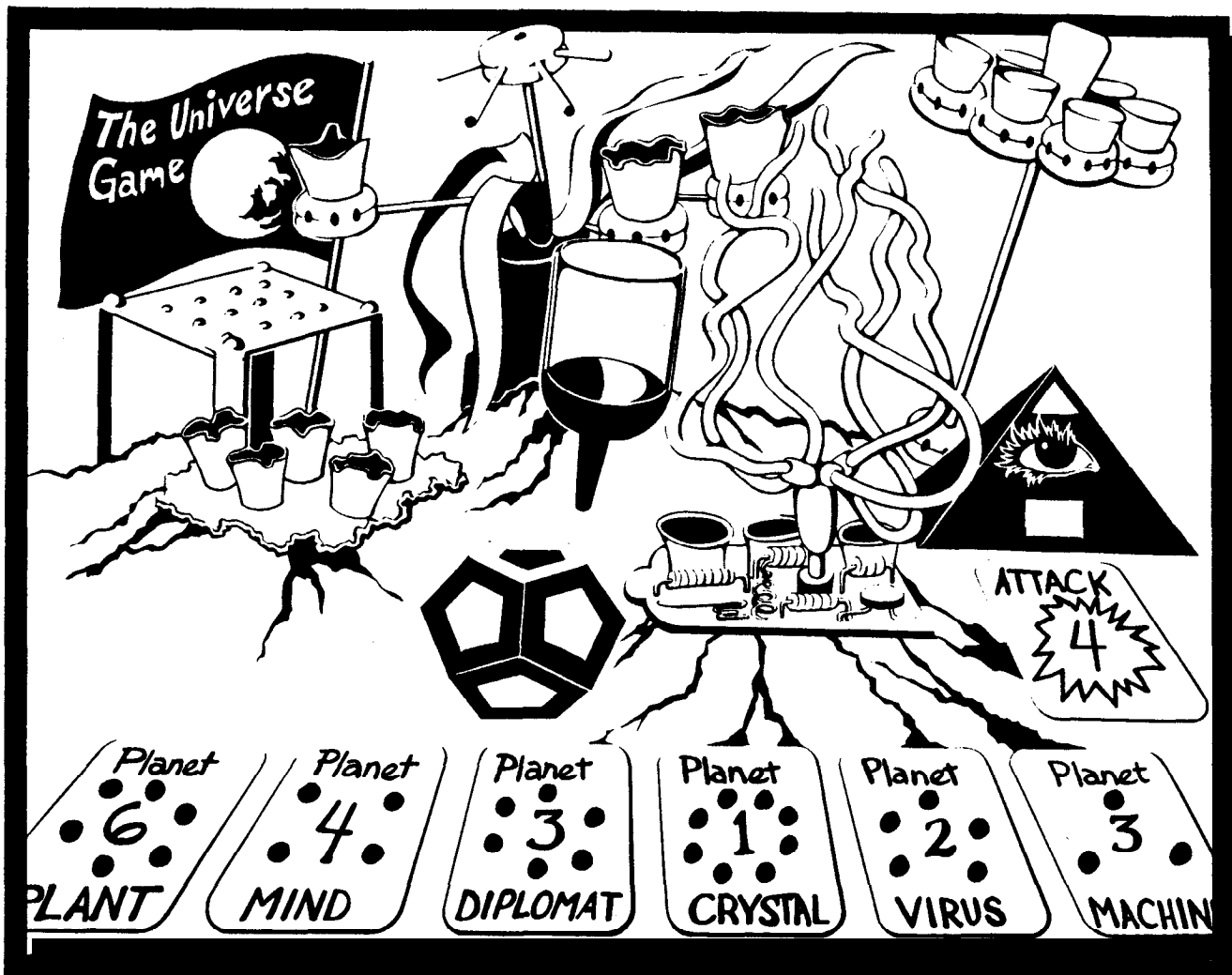
Thus we came to know Ned Horn. Within a month or two we had incorporated Eon Products, made production arrangements, hired an artist, located a warehouse and shipping service, and set up a home office in my house. We were rolling.

Then we got to think about how to sell the games. Nobody had any experience in doing that, so we decided to take out ads in science fiction magazines and sell the game by mail. So we took out full page ads in all the major s.f. magazines and waited for the orders to come trucking in. After a few months, a trickle started. A few months later, it stopped. Hmm, we reasoned, there's more to this business than we thought.

So we huddled. Ned had taken some of the production proofs to a thing called 'Origins' that summer, and suggested we follow up on some interest there. At the time he had said it was a war-gaming convention and we had figured our stuff was too simple and mass-market oriented for hard-core gamers like that. But a sale was a sale so we started calling people involved in Origins. And we also went on the science fiction convention circuit that fall, renting tables at cons from Connecticut to Florida and trying to spark interest in hotel lobbies and unused meeting rooms by setting up and playing. Slowly we fell into a network of players, stores, and distributors oriented to intelligent and challenging games. And, slowly, the game began to spread.

That first run we produced 10,000 COSMIC ENCOUNTERS. It cost us about \$27,000. At \$2.70 a game, we figured, we can sell it for \$10 and make a handsome profit. But we were figuring we'd sell mostly by mail. It turns out you don't sell games mostly by mail. They sell mostly in stores. And stores buy one or two of this, and one or two of that. So they want to buy from distributors who stock games from all the different publishers. Stores have to make a living, and distributors have to make a living. So when you sell to a distributor, you don't get \$10. No, no, no. You get \$4.00. Maybe \$4.50. Maybe you don't get paid at all.

All these simple facts seem so obvious if you think about it. But we hadn't thought about it. Who thinks about the real world of business when you can have more fun designing and playing a game? So, from not thinking about it, we had a great game, beginning to sell well, and we were still losing money. All the ads, phone bills, shipping costs, warehouse rent, etc. ad infinitum were eating more than \$2.00 a game. None of



The Early COSMIC ENCOUNTER (circa 1972): In the background (1. to 1.) tower the Crystal, Plant, and Diplomat, and in the foreground skulk the Virus, Machine, and Mind. Systems had different numbers of planets then, and the polyhedral die was rolled to

determine the system to challenge. The planet cards indicated which planet of each system was the "secret home" of the Alien (taking it meant the Alien lost its power). Note the Machine's wires, used to duplicate the Plant's vines when the two were both main players.

us was taking dime out, and yet we were sinking into the red.

Our ace in the hole was Expansion Sets. Early on we had discovered that we couldn't produce all 35 Aliens for the basic game without it costing twice as much. So we figured to sell them as add-ons if the game took off. Well, it looked as if it was going to, and we had 20 more Aliens. So out came 2 Expansion Sets, 10 Aliens apiece (plus another hex and more tokens). We released those in December, and not only did those take off, but the basic game sales sprinted, too. **Aha**, we thought, they really like it. They play these new ones as much as the old, and that means more people exposed to the game and they go out and buy one and show it to their other friends. . . **And** the word-of-mouth about COSMIC was begun, and has never stopped.

Our next run was 20,000 games in 1978, and after that we lost track because parts got out of phase and we'd do boxes now, hexes then, powers another time. I don't think anybody knows how many **COSMIC EN-**

COUNTER games are really out there, anymore. We don't, for sure. We've changed the box cover, added more and more Expansion Sets, and honestly had a great time of it. We've used the **COSMIC** proceeds to publish more games, and tried to carve out a spot for ourselves in the world of gaming.

But it hasn't been easy. Even with the phenomenal acceptance of **COSMIC**, we only managed to bring on our first full time person, Peter Olotka, in 1982. Till then we all worked regular full-time jobs. Now our line, plus the video design work mentioned earlier in this issue, has enabled us all to work for Eon full-time. Now you're going to see something!

I guess if there is any lesson to this at all, it's the simple one I remember learning at my mother's knee: "To do anything well, it's going to be 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration". I think Thomas Edison said it first. She was a great one for picking up aphorisms. But I suspect she got the percentages wrong. It's a lot more sweat than that.

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