

ers The Battalion

Wargaming popularity continues to rise here

By ROY BRAGG
Editor

Closest warmongers, rejoice. It is now possible to stage any war from interstellar dog fights to the mic Wars — with the purchase of a war game at a local toy store.

War games — based on historical and fictional military conflicts — have skyrocketed in popularity in the past three years.

Once reserved for students of military tactics and strategy, war games are now being played by people of all ages, said Tom Shaw, executive vice president for Avalon Hill, the largest war game manufacturer in the world.

Shaw and local toy store owners in the Bryan-College Station area agree that the way gaming boom is a by-product of the economic recession. The high cost of entertainment — movies, movies and eating out — has forced people to stay at home and seek alternative forms of entertainment, said Frances Anders, manager of Kelly's Toyland in Bryan. War games, she added, present the logical solution to this dilemma.

The price of the average war game, Shaw added, is \$15 — less in the cost of going to the movies and eating dinner in a typical restaurant.

"You're talking about three hours of entertainment for about \$30," he said. "When you buy a game, you've got endless hours of recreation. Fifteen bucks is the best doggone return buy possible."

Another reason for the popularity of war games, Shaw added, is the emphasis on history in the games. "What we have in war games," he said, "is the better mousetrap." People who do not like studying can find a bit of history from war games, he said.

Most are developed with respect to the politics of the conflict involved, he said.

In addition, Shaw added, war games allow an "unlimited amount of playing" on the part of players.

The success of war games in Bryan-College Station is due to the

fact that this is a war gaming community, said Ann Hays, owner of Circus of Toys in College Station.

"This is a fairly intelligent community," Hays said, adding that most college towns have large war gaming communities.

Coupled with the upsurge in popularity, war game sales are high also.

Gross sales for war games are \$25 million annually, Shaw said, but are just a fraction of the billion-dollar gaming industry.

According to an article in the Dec. 26, 1977 issue of Time magazine, total game sales in the United States were over \$400 million for that year alone.

Shaw said he did not know of any such figures for total game sales in 1979.

"I don't have the figures because I don't keep up with stupid games," he said in a telephone interview from the company's headquarters in Baltimore. "I'm only concerned with war games. War games fall into a completely different niche."

Avalon Hill manufactures over 100 different games. The company produces some sports games and other games that Shaw calls "near-war" games — games that involve war-related diplomacy. But, despite these other forays, Avalon Hill is best known for its war games.

War games can be divided into two categories: board games and role-playing games.

The board games are exercises in military tactics and strategy. They are similar to traditional games like Monopoly in that they come with their own playing surfaces. The playing surface — the board — is usually a map of the battleground or of the warring nations. These maps usually have a superimposed hexagonal gridwork. The gridwork is used for measuring movement by the player's armies.

The tactical games have titles like Panzerblitz (about German and Russian battles in World War II), Richthofen's War (aerial battles in World

War I), Kingmaker (based on the War of the Roses), and Starfleet Battles (Starships battling in deep space).

In games of this type, players command an army and try to achieve a pre-determined objective.

In role-playing, players adopt the persona of a member of another society and make the decisions the character would make in different situations — the players become the characters.

The most popular role-playing game is Dungeons and Dragons (D&D). It is based on a medieval, fantasy society such as the one portrayed in "The Lord of the Rings."

In D&D, characters slay dragons and other menaces trying to discover treasure in the wilderness or in underground dungeons. The overseer of a D&D trip is the Gamemaster (GM). The GM has a map of the area in question and controls the environment and the flow of the game.

D&D is manufactured by TSR Hobbies of Lake Geneva, Wis. The game was invented by a shoe salesman named Gary Gygax in 1974. Today he is TSR's president and is still actively involved in the ongoing development of D&D accessories and playing aids.


Over 600,000 people regularly play D&D, said Will Neibling, vice president for sales. Since 1974, sales of D&D and the various playing aids have doubled every year.

The \$10 Basic D&D Set, which includes all of the various dice and rule books necessary for beginning play, sells at the rate of \$50,000 a month.

The D&D craze has spawned a magazine, the Dragon, a \$2 monthly with a circulation of 10,000. The magazine contains related articles and advice for players and fans of D&D and other role-playing games.

The Dragon is published by a subsidiary branch of TSR.





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