

Armies, soldiers invade the MSC

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Warcon.

The first syllable gives you the hint that it's something dealing with war. In this case, a wargaming convention.

But that's not all.

Warcon '81, sponsored by GROMETS, a subcommittee of the Memorial Student Center Recreation Committee, existed for about 48 weekend hours Feb. 20-22 as a welter of people from all walks of life interested in one thing — gaming. Complex games dealing in simulated bloodshed and fantasy role-playing games where players cooperate to win the gold or free the princess — or maybe just to stay alive.

G.R.O.M.E.T.S. stands for Game Replications Of Military, Economic and Tactical Situations.

The convention began registration Friday afternoon and ended with a Sunday afternoon awards ceremony. By that time, though, several winners had already taken their trophies (and boards, and counters, and miniatures, and ...) and gone home, exhausted by grueling four-hour (or more) gaming sessions.

Conventional reporting would have proved impossible. Fourteen games, most with three multi-hour rounds each, most with enough rules to fill 30 or 40 pages of close-set text; miscellaneous games ranging from poker ("we got tired and wanted to play something simple") to minor informal versions of the official competition games.

I missed most of the first rounds, but it didn't matter: I couldn't have played most of them anyway. The ersatz warfare rampant on the second floor of the MSC and in several Rudder Tower rooms was not understandable; it was merely complex to the point of needing several hours and lots of practice to understand what was going on.

One thing I did understand was these people were having fun. The blood shed and troops

massacred and planets destroyed with a roll of the dice or a tactical mistake were all part of the game, no more, no less. These people were not out for blood; the only prizes were a \$100 cash prize for the Squad Leader-Cross of Iron winner (more about that later) and some trophies for some of the various larger games. Players were friendly, squabbles few; referees for the games were final judge of any dispute. None of the "Bang, bang, you're dead!"—"No, I'm not!" disputes found in kids' games. These were *adults*, playing grownup versions of kids' games.

A large section of ballroom floor was given over to naval miniatures — and I mean *miniature*. We're talking about model ships a maximum of three inches long; most were under an inch and a half. Scale generally ran about 1:2400. This event was dominated by San Antonio's Trinity University Conflict Simulation Society, which recreated historical battles ranging from the sailing era to World War II. Damage was determined by estimating the range in inches to an enemy ship and handing the worthy opponent your tape measure. There was also a "cruiser free-for-all," where everybody got one ship and the last one left "afloat" was the winner.

Or how about Squad Leader-Cross of Iron, which pitted World War II Nazis against Russians fighting for their Motherland, complete with sealed orders for each single-elimination round. One-on-one warfare, players commanding opposing troops but laughing chummily with each other all the while. The winner got a \$100 prize from the Journal of World War II Wargaming.

How would you like to tangle with OGRE, an intelligent supertank capable of devastating a planet? Or maybe you'd like to engage in Stellar Conquest, and colonize a few quadrants of the Galaxy?

How about Diplomat or Nuclear War, which were games only in that the secret weapons,



Four participants in a typical wargame study involved in Warcon '81 and plan strategies. About 400 players were

Photo by Chuck Chapman

propaganda, political double-dealing and nuclear warheads were simulated?

For history buffs, Kingmaker engaged in militarily-oriented simulation of the War of the Roses, when the great houses of England vied for the crown. Third Reich and Victory in the Pacific likewise, both dealing with World War II scenarios.

And then there's role-playing, otherwise known as acting out your heroic-type fantasies in the company of others. Without shame — it's only a game. Dungeons and Dragons is the most well-known variety of this game, which has blossomed rapidly in the last half decade. In a world chock full of orcs, goblins, giants, elves, dragons, hoards of gold, and other items and characters straight out of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, you and the others of your six-man (or person) team try to survive the nasty tricks the Dungeon Master (head referee and overall guide of the course of the game) throws at you.

Let's not overlook the dealer's room, stocking literally thousands of dollars in games and gaming paraphernalia: computer game programs, books, handpainted miniatures ranging from battleships to goblins to Napoleonic soldiers; games with names like Starfleet Battles, MechWar, and the Campaigns of Napoleon.

Contrary to some people's conception of these things, the average wargamer is not a clone of the guy on the "Are You A Nerd?" poster. Quite the contrary. Most of the con-goers were male, but there were no more than the normal scattering of crazies one finds in a weekend gathering of about 400 people, male or female. Robert Sanders, director of the dealer's room, said, "Wargaming is a respectable industry. It's really gone up in the last few years — even Walter Cronkite is a wargamer."

Kathleen Donelson, a building construction senior at Texas A&M, who does the public relations work for GROMETS, agreed. "Most of the people (at

the convention) are the more intellectual-type people, folks looking for excitement and some fun."

Participation at the convention was not limited to students. Oh, no. Young and old, students, IBM specialists, businessmen, Army officers ... the U.S. Army was involved in sponsoring a wargame called "Dunnkempf," the name derived from a German description of wargames for real. This one was not as complicated, in some ways, as the other games: no hexagons

covering the boards, no intricate tables of probability, no rolls of the dice. All you had to know were "simple" things like how to call for artillery fire, range and characteristics of a myriad of modern weaponry, Soviet military psychology ... nothing is as simple as it looks. But it's still fun.

Donelson said the convention ran "very smoothly." She said part of the roughly \$500 profit made from Warcon would go to buying new gaming equipment for the club; the rest will go to the MSC General Fund.



Some of the wargames sold during Warcon included Battles for the Ardennes, Modern Battles II and others.

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