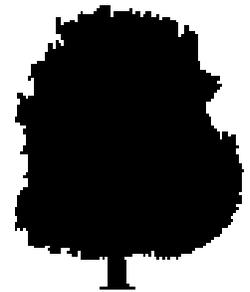




# *Military Muddling*



Volume 16 Issue 8

Chestnut Lodge Wargames Group Newsletter

Christmas 2006

## Editorial

Seasons Greetings to one and all. At this time of year I tend to think of stories of soldiers in foxholes, shivering in the snow, wondering if they would get a break for festivities. Fortunately in playing our games we don't have to suffer the hardships of real war. My Christmas wish is that real life be ever more pleasant for everyone.

Please, over the holidays write some articles, particularly, your hopes and intentions for upcoming games.

**Daniel T Shaw**

### Contributions for Military Muddling

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## Forthcoming Events

Saturday 16 December, Winter Solstice Social Meeting at John Rutherford's Home. Games likely include "Interesting Times" about the warlord period in China (1916-1936), American War of Independence, Sarah's 18th party, plus films after gaming proper.

Friday evening 06 January 2007. Dinner meeting, venue t.b.a.

Saturday 07 January 2007, Heroic Samurai (Jim) and Light of the Trees (Andrew/Trevor), venue t.b.a.

**Please remember, when members are kind enough to allow CLWG to use their homes for meetings, to show them the simple courtesy of informing them by telephone or email that you will be attending!**

see also <http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/clwg/> and <http://www.chestnutlodge.org.uk/>

## Further Reports from the 2006 Games Design Conference

Game Design Conference Saturday 30 September and Sunday 1 October 2006 at The Hampshire School, 9, Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, London W2 3TB.

### Offside report : Ireland 1691 by Brian Cameron

This was more of a try-out than a design session as Steve brought along a very nicely produced map and lots of counters. It was actually a pretty well developed board game.

I found I needed more context as its not a period I'm familiar with and thus it wasn't clear what we, as the Catholics post battle of the Boyne, were trying to do. Once equipped with a better understanding we had an interesting time. Two bits I particularly liked, the supply system and the leadership bonus. As you advanced a supply line was established which made it difficult to retreat in any other direction. The leadership bonus was the number of dice you could re-roll, yours or the other side's.

I thought it would work better with two maps (though they are quite large) so as to get much more of a fog of war situation in a period where scouting and intelligence seems to have been rudimentary.

### Onside report : English Civil War by Brian Cameron

Some years ago I did a megagame on this subject, War Without An Enemy. It ended up as a rather sprawling and (to me) unsatisfactory affair with too much number crunching. I'd thus like to have another go. Aspects I would want to cover are:

- The difficulties of recruiting armies
- The difficulty of supplying armies
- The necessity for garrisons to hold areas / delay enemy movement
- The importance of having an army in the field to oppose an enemy army
- Problems of getting troops to operate far from home
- The risk of battle
- More of the political struggles in parliament and the king's council

We had a most useful discussion and tried out some of the proposed mechanisms using one of my old maps and some improvised counters. We came up with some fairly simple systems to represent aspects such as recruiting and I think this is a game I'll pursue for 2008 (the megagame programme is full for 2007!). My thanks to all for their contributions.

### Offside report : Perfect Role Playing Game Combat System by Brian Cameron

The session came out of Dave's unhappiness with the combat system in D&D (possibly AD&D, the distinction is lost on me), though some who participated were quite content with it. There was a lot of stuff batted back and forth about card based systems so I suggested basing it on the Star Wars Epic Duels system which Jim used as a basis for his Kung Fu Masters game. This has lots of cards for the various characters, some character specific so give them the characteristics of the movies so it seems well suited to a role playing system. Dave may well try this but as most of his players seem happy with the existing system he may meet some consumer resistance – perhaps time to cull them and start again!

### Offside report : Maintenance Of Peace by Brian Cameron

Dave has looked at the social, economic, political and military developments and changes 1920s and 1930s as a possible megagame but came to the conclusion that it wasn't on. In the wake of the economic, etc, systems developed for Jim's The Last War game we suggested it would be worth a fresh look.

While there are doubtless systems that could be used and developed for the economics, etc, the biggest stumbling block appears to be player roles. An example will best illustrate the problem. Say that the French team has players representing the political spectrum from left to right. What happens when, say, the right takes power? Do the lefties enthusiastically take their roles in the government – will they work hard at it given that a failure by this rightist government could well bring them back to power. Say the right take power in a nazi state and there aren't going to be any more elections? The leftists are probably purged and are now in need of new roles if they don't want to become fascists. I don't think we had a solution to this problem and thus Dave may well be right, much as I hate to admit it! Still worth thinking about though, it's such a cracking period.

### **Offside report : Dictators, Democracy And Domination by Brian Cameron**

Round two of games about the 1920s and 1930s. Daniel's is rather a different approach, almost, as we played through a sample game, a role-playing game centred around prominent figures of, in this case, France. Again, I could see a problem when one side gained dominance, who would run the country, what would others do? My conclusion was the same, great period, just big, big problems fitting it all in.

### **Onside report : Quick And Easy Fantasy Battles by Brian Cameron.**

I have thought about re-doing my 1494 megagame (about the French invasion of the Italian states) as a science fiction game to save people doing violence to the history. Jim suggested that a fantasy setting would be better, an idea which has intrigued me. What I'd need however is a battle system which would really involve the players so that their decisions had a consequence (rather than the usual tot up the unit values and roll a dice) and that can be done in about five minutes. Apart from ripping off Rob Copper's battles system from his successors game I'd no idea how to do this.

Mukul suggested ripping off Peter Merritt's battle board system (which came from Andy Grainger's Clouds in the West megagame I think) which has an battlefield consisting of centre, wings and reserve and units are allocated to those areas. Combat is then resolved on the basis of comparing die rolls with bonuses for various troop types.

Using a pack of cards for the units we started on this track. Arthur then made the useful observation that most fantasy fiction hinged around heroic combat. We then modified the system so that the units fought each other in an order chosen by the players (whoever won the previous combat played a unit first) and a winning unit stayed on the battlefield. Some player input came in as player only used five units, thus having to chose which to play from larger sized armies. Finally, the main event and the heroes set to, using the number of units they have on the battlefield as the number of hits they could take. It thus seemed possible that a small, elite force could take on a much larger opponent and still win. I shall design some cards and give this a try at some future meeting. Thanks for all the ideas and it proves once again that if you're stuck for a mechanism bring the problem along to a CLWG session!

### **June Meeting by James Kemp**

This was in Dave Boundy's house (well in the garden mostly) with a pretty good turnout, about a dozen I think (although I didn't make a note of the numbers at the time). Dave, knowing how well most of us would appreciate it, arranged for an airshow and a special flypast of amongst other things, a Lancaster Bomber, a Vampire (or maybe a Vixen), a spitfire, hurricane, several other jet trainers and fighters and some nice formation flying by some chaps in blue Hawks. As well as all this we played some games.

First up was Steve Chalice's game about Palestine. This was a factional politics game about being the relatively top dog when it came to election time. Attacking the common enemy was always popular but not as effective as attacking another faction and blaming it on a third. The game was very well presented with a professional looking map (Mukul had better watch out). There were hordes of counters though for upgrading units and most of us suggested to Steve that he just have a track on the counter that moved. The mechanisms for combat and bombing etc were pretty simple and worked for us for the most part. I never

really got to use those as I had adopted a different strategy of recruiting people and grabbing area to gain influence rather than blowing up my rivals for power through popular opinion (that would have been stage two in my plan).

As always with tryouts we stopped just as it was getting interesting. There was a long discussion about ways to improve the game and also to get more politics and interaction into it as well as how to add flavour to the workable but fairly generic mechanisms. There certainly seemed like a lot of mileage in the system. It looks like it might well see the light of day either at a megagame or at least other large one day games where there is time to play it to conclusions, or at least for long enough to see where it takes you.

We split into two groups after Palestine (isn't that always what happens when you get involved in Palestine?) One group went off to do a design session and I ran a rapid playtest of a colony development/management system that I had developed on a spreadsheet to sit alongside a political game I wanted to run on the machinations of rebellion in a colony. I wanted this to be a sub-system that would provide input to the political process but which would take only a little high level input to work through all the detailed management in a similar way to the Ursa Major megagame that Jim and John did a few years back.

Overall the concept worked, although there were a few things I hadn't thought of when the players were making decisions which was the purpose of the playtest process. The speed of resolution and development was good and there was a feedback loop on supply and demand that appeared to work and which, because it was done on a spreadsheet, took no umpire time to resolve. I was also able to do debt management as well, which I think gives a more realistic edge to development games. We played about seven turns before my laptop ran out of battery.

That said there were a number of things that I want to fix, including the possibility that there could be competing colonies, or at least major development areas, on the same planet. That would give the political players a different set of feedback for each of the major corporate blocks. Although until I've progressed the briefings and player roles for the main game this will have to take a back seat.

### **July Meeting by James Kemp**

I arrived a little late for the July meeting thanks to engineering works. So I missed the start of Martin French's Napoleonic naval game and came in as the Captain of the last ship in the British line (although Mukul did try and palm me off with command).

Despite not having any briefing, a play sheet or anything else I managed to play the game with no bother. This was partly down to its similarity with a number of other naval games I've played (Hellfire and the Pirates of Yendor megagame to name two recent examples) and also a familiarity with the period in question.

In particular I liked the way it played, the modified dice (which made the to hit roll the range fired at or less), and also the use of counters for orders and the crew. My only gripes, which are very minor, were the use of hexes for movement (which have advantages that make things simpler to do but loses some of the flavour of sailing) and also the shared pool of hit counters (which meant that when more than one ship was hit in a turn the distribution of hits was skewed in favour of the no-repairable hits as these were returned to the pool).

Overall this was a playable game. I've played worse games that have been commercially available and that had allegedly been playtested. This game had a lot of neat features and the huge advantage of being able to be picked up as I went along. You can't really say more than that.

Dig, Dig, Dig was next. It was another relatively simple game in terms of the way it worked, although largely because Jim was developing it by playing it out. There were two teams of dwarf miners, one with the defenders of a besieged city and the other with the attackers. The ground between the city and the siege

lines was stylised into a 3D grid on A3 paper. There were four layers of ground under the surface and these corresponded to the sort of levels at which mining could occur.

Each team had a number of miners, some warriors and some materials with which to build special devices (doors, pumps, traps etc). Each grid square was notionally divided into 9 smaller squares (three a side for the arithmetically challenged). This allowed us to calculate the amount of time it took to dig out the desired shape of tunnel (e.g. digging straight through a square was three points of digging, a t-junction made for four etc). Each digging team could shift 6 points per turn.

Trevor and I were on the attackers side and we came up with a plan that assumed that the defenders would not be very aggressive. This involved a complex network of tunnels that were intended to sucker in the defenders once we had created the traps and defeat them. Unfortunately we were playing some very aggressive defence and they broke into our tunnels just as we were starting to consolidate. We lost the melee and were thrown back to the surface (well those that survived were).

I spent the whole journey home thinking about this game and how I could make better traps (I'm not telling you here, I might want to use them against you in a future game). It is definitely a game I want to play a good bit more, and one which I think would benefit from the players knowing it better. It might even work as an online or e-mail game with an umpire getting sent instructions on what is being built where.

This is going to be part of the Siege of Yendor megagame sometime towards the end of the programme (if not beyond that still). I'll be putting my name down as dwarf mining umpire...

## November Meeting

There were three sessions at the 05 November 2006 meeting of CLWG, attended by Trevor, Mukul, Jim, Brian, John, Peter and James. A jolly decent day was had by one and all. Thanks are due to the Kemp family for hosting. The sessions were:

- Torchwood. A Victorian roleplaying game run by Brian Cameron
- Starship Marine. A classic figure game run by Jim
- Remember, Remember. An old favourite re-run by Jim and Brian covering the gunpowder plot of 1605.

Meanwhile Daniel and Nick met at Daniel's in the Jura, France, who, engrossed with miniature figures and the enthusiasm of little Angel wanting to create larger and larger tabletop battles, forgot all about the lunar calendar and the significance of 5<sup>th</sup> of the month.

## Onside Report : Torchwood by Brian Cameron

Jim and I had been discussing the series was and how much better it would have been to have set it in Victorian England. As so often we ended up with the concept that the game would start after the Dr Who episode in which Queen Victoria sets up the Torchwood Institute to 'investigate and fight other worldly menaces'.

The players were cast as members of the privy council, summoned to a meeting with Her Majesty's ADC and tasked with setting up the Torchwood Institute. We dressed the roles up a bit with ratings for Influence, Closeness to Royalty, Conservatism and Rank.

An interesting discussion followed, mainly about the importance of getting the right sort of chap involved. An up and coming admiral, Hood, was to be recruited to head Torchwood and he would report to the Torchwood committee, whose membership would consist of the privy councillors present, thus giving themselves an extra job and influence.

It was agreed that there would need to be branches specialising in information gathering, investigation and combat. A new, seemingly independent, publication, Astonishing Times, was to be set up, specifically to gather reports of odd occurrences from around the world. Groups of operatives could then be sent off to investigate.

As it was all to be jolly secret not even the Prime Minister was to be informed. It was agreed that the senior management team should include a military man, someone from the new Special Irish Branch (who would have experience of intelligence work), a scientist and a theologian (after all, the Queen had condemned the whole business as 'ungodly' and the venture would need a good moral tone).

A ship (in terms of a steam yacht or some such) seemed a good idea and a temporary base is to be set up in a warehouse in the Port of London. The plan for a more suitable base hinges round building a part of the underground railway system which within quite a short space of time will be declared unnecessary and which will then be sealed off and used as a base.

It seemed an entertaining discussion and the thought is to follow this up with a meeting of the 'senior management' to flesh out the organisation and then do some Torchwood investigations as games involving the chaps on the ground.

### **Offside Report : Torchwood by James Kemp**

Brian started this off with a short clip from the end of the Doctor Who episode that had inspired the game. The episode (titled Torchwood) involved the Doctor saving Queen Victoria from a werewolf in the Highlands in 1879. At the end of the episode (after QV has knighted and then immediately banished the Doctor and his assistant Rose) there is the scene that Brian showed us. QV says that there are clearly otherworldly enemies out there and she wants Great Britain to be able to deal with them, and with the Doctor should he reappear. To achieve this aim she has the ultra secret Torchwood Institute established.

To work out the finer details of how the Torchwood Institute should be set up Brian had us as a hand picked group of Privy Councillors to form some recommendations to Her Majesty. The Torchwood Committee was chaired by the Duke of Cornwall (Trevor) with the Earl of Sutherland, Lord Taunton, Sir Hardly Worthitt (Secretary) and Sir Rupert Effingham (Page of the Back Stairs).

Arrayed in comfy chairs we set about the task of establishing how Torchwood should be lead, what it should do, to whom it would report and where the money would come from.

There was much entertaining discussion over the right sort of chap to provide the necessary sort of leadership for the institute. Taking as read that he'd been to the right school and wasn't the sort to have gone to University to become a dangerous intellectual (or worse still, a liberal) the chap was to have a modicum of intelligence. He needed to be an excellent judge of character so that he could recruit the right people to get the job done. Lastly he needed to be of stout heart and high in moral fibre (good for the digestion don't you know). It was felt that the best place to go looking for all these sterling qualities was in the Admiralty. A check round those present suggested that Admiral Hood was the soundest chap we could think of.

The conversation moved on to discuss the merits of having other sorts of chaps as deputies to the good Admiral to make sure that he would be well advised. The committee agreed that it was vitally important to have a theologian on the management of the institute and also a General. There was much discussion on the merits or otherwise of engineers and the scientific mechanical sort. It was resolved that a natural philosopher might be useful as a deputy but that the mechanical aspects should be left as humble servants. General Flashman VC, known as a stouthearted, loyal and brave subject was selected as a suitable chap to provide military expertise to the Institute, it also being remembered that he had been involved in political activities in his younger days. The choice of theologian was to be referred to Her Majesty's chaplain for a recommendation but that would need to be someone well versed in divinity as well as being devout.

On the matter of exactly what the Institute would do we recommended that there should be a collation of information on strange phenomena, probably through setting up a journal of some kind to collect these stories and paying readers a bounty for submitting those that were felt fit to print. The Institute should also be involved in investigating reports, perhaps using some of the most advanced and modern methods being used currently by the Special Irish Branch, whereupon it was felt that one of their suitable chaps should be seconded to head such a section in the Institute. There needed also to be a research arm to look into the

phenomena to see what we could learn about them and how to deal most effectively when they should turn up. This latter point lead to the need for an arm to respond to any incursions or clean up otherworldly evidence after the fact.

Funding for the Torchwood Institute would mostly come from the Admiralty Vote via the Royal Dockyards. Some money would come from an endowment from Her Majesty. The Institute would engage with loyal and trusted entrepreneurs to ensure sufficient funds should there be problems in the future with obtaining money by Vote whilst maintaining absolute secrecy as to its purpose.

As regards secrecy it was felt that with the exception of the Torchwood Committee, the Leader of Torchwood and his immediate deputies, there was to be no acknowledgement to those involved of the exact scale of operations. Each operation or arm and each area office would be kept in isolation of each other. Those involved would only be told as much as was necessary for them to do what was asked of them and the reports would all be submitted to the Torchwood Committee by the Admiral as required. There was discussion of telling the government of the day. The prevailing view was that it would be only be appropriate to tell Ministers of the Crown that came from the upper House and even then only if it directly pertained to their responsibilities. Should Her Majesty require one such to be briefed then she could perfectly well have him admitted, as a Privy Councillor, to the Torchwood Committee.

Whilst not perhaps covering every question with a detailed answer we had produced a good basis for proceeding and what remained to be done could be achieved by our chosen leadership once they had been formally appointed.

### **Offside Report : Starship Marine by James Kemp**

The CLWG session happened to coincide with the Full Moon in November. Usually there are a group of us, mainly but not exclusively CLWG members, that gather on a full moon to play in a campaign being run by Jim and set in his universe. Currently we are playing the part of a group of mercenaries. Rather than attempting to run two sessions in close proximity Jim brought along some starship marines and a deck plan for a merchant ship for us to have a training mission prior to our next mission as mercenaries acting as starship marines.

Brian was nominated to be the Group Commander in overall command, Trevor was his 2ic and John Rutherford, Mukul and myself were the squad commanders. Jim and Peter Howland ran the defending forces.

The ship was all on a single deck with three concentric sets of rooms with two circular access corridors running round them, each of these circular corridors had two short linking corridors. There were two main airlocks at opposite sides of the ship with two much smaller emergency air locks at ninety degrees to the main airlocks. The control rooms (main control and power controls) were in the centre of the ship. There wasn't a direct route from any airlock to either power control, you would need to traverse at least a quarter of the circle between the link corridors, however there the two link corridors did line up with the main airlocks.

Brian's plan was a relatively simple one. My squad would go in first and secure the entry point while blasting the doors on the access corridor. John's squad would immediately follow through and make straight for the main control by the most direct route. Mukul's squad would follow John's squad and deal with any resistance that had been bypassed. Once John's squad had moved though mine I would take my squad round the outer corridor and make for the power control room. The Group HQ would remain in the main airlock area and provide fire support as necessary.

Our plan largely ignored what the enemy might do. In itself this could have been a problem, but the feeling was that it was a straightforward operation and there wasn't anything that could go wrong provided that the defenders weren't too numerous.

On entry my squad moved rapidly to the doors (which the defenders had left open in an attempt to sucker us in). We put demo charges on all the doors within reach and took up defensive positions. Sure enough one of the doors closed cutting off a third of my squad from the rest. This was combined with three enemy marines appearing in other doorways slightly further away. A short fight ensued in which one of my marines was hit and in return two enemy were downed. The third ducked back inside a room and closed the door.

We duly blew the other doors and placed a demo charge on the door of the room the enemy marine had disappeared into. John's squad moved through my position, Mukul's came in behind and we moved to cover the trapped enemy marine.

The next turn saw half of my squad dealing with the enemy marine and the other half progressing up an empty circular corridor to the next link corridor to get to power control. John's squad also moved towards power control and met some of the crew attempting to dispute their progress. The results were no as one-sided as we would have liked, but John's squad wasn't slowed much (although he did take a casualty).

John & Mukul met the main enemy resistance and slowly overcame it in a spectacularly bad display of shooting from both sides. My squad continued round the ship and down the link corridor where we found some more crew and took another casualty when we looked round a corner.

As we massed on the outside of the door to power control to burst in after blowing the door John's squad was just breaking into main control. Yet more appalling shooting all round kept this indecisive enough for my squad to take a third casualty from some grenades as well as taking down a fourth enemy marine in return. Almost as soon as we blew the doors on power control the ship's captain decided to surrender as they had just lost main control.

### **Offside Report: Starship Marine Boarding Action by Brian Cameron**

I think Jim did this because it has been a while since he'd done one. I managed to get a laid back role in charge of the boarding action which meant that I came up with a plan and left it to my subordinates, Messrs Patel, Rutherford, Farrant and Kemp, to execute it. This they ably did though the lack of casualties in Lt Patel's unit suggested to me that he hadn't applied himself to the task as enthusiastically as he might. Mr Howland directed an able defence but obviously we won – a victory which clearly had everything to do with my plan and nothing to do with Peter's appalling dice rolling!

### **Onside Report : Remember, Remember by Brian Cameron**

It must have been back in the eighties that Jim and I, being impressed by a book I had acquired about the gunpowder plot and the November meeting being on the 5th, first did this game. The timing of the November meeting this year led to a repeat. Not having the same sort of numbers these days we had all the players as Catholic conspirators and left out the aspect of the game which dealt with the authorities view of the affair (possibly characterised in the original game by Peter Merritt's take on Cecil, the secretary of state, organising his own plot so as to discredit the Catholics in case the players didn't get a viable one going...)

The conspirators started with a discussion reviewing their options. Given the need to dispose of the protestant nobility (and possibly the King, though one of the plotters objected to this) the possibilities of an armed attack, setting fire to the Houses of Parliament were examined and discarded (too difficult to raise a large force of armed men and maintain secrecy, the possibility of too many escaping from a mere fire). In the end the novel idea of blowing up the Palace of Westminster during the state opening of Parliament which decided on – interestingly it did seem to be the one solution which might work!

A cover of operating as wine merchants was decided upon and some of the plotters were despatched to the continent to purchase gunpowder and wine (it was thought that some 30 odd barrels of powder would be needed).

The cellars under the Palace of Westminster being occupied by a coal merchant, the plotters rented the only suitable premises nearby, unfortunately some two hundred yards away. Some calculations as to tunnel size led to some daunting figures for the amount of earth to be disposed off – 600 tons! There was also a sizeable requirement for pit props. The difficulty of digging with only three diggers was also considered and progress was rated as about a yard a day (this was probably generous, the real plotters found the going much harder). Even so it was going to take about a year to dig the tunnel and there were concerns about missing the 1605 opening!

Great was the relief among the plotters when suddenly the coal merchant ceased trading and vacated the cellars, which they now rented and solved the tunnel-digging problem. Perhaps there could have been some suspicion about how convenient this was – the suggestion is that historically Cecil had become aware of the plot and helped it along so make a more convincing case against the plotters.

While the cellars were being equipped with gunpowder there were regular inspections by the palace guards but they were generously supplied with wine. Come the evening of the 4th different guards turned up and a fight ensued when they attempted to arrest Fawkes and the others present. A lantern was smashed and the guards were unable to extinguish the fire in time – the opening of Parliament was delayed until a new venue could be found...

Meanwhile there had been something of a falling out among the plotters. Digby (no, not that one...) strongly objected to the King perishing in the explosion and made it clear that he would attempt to delay him on his way to the opening. Over a meal and a drink he was stabbed to death by Lord Percy (John) shortly before the guards broke in and arrested them all. Percy's attempts to claim that he had killed Digby when the latter had attempted to recruit him into the plot came apart under the usual rigorous questioning techniques of the time. Cecil was left to put in place his desired crackdown on the adherents of a dangerous religion who were all too ready to use violence to achieve their ends!

Finally, to round off the evening, there was a re-enactment of the destruction of the Palace of Westminster using a highly detailed scale model built by Jim (ok, perhaps it wasn't so highly detailed and the scale was probably a bit loose...) A number of Congreve rockets were launched in celebration of the failure of the plot.

### **Offside Report : Remember, Remember by James Kemp**

This was the last of the three games. The players were all plotters in the Gunpowder plot, although with varying degrees of ardour in their wish to come to blows to improve the lot of Catholics. There was a copious amount of briefing, a few pages on the general background, a page on the main characters of the plot and then a couple of pages of character briefing for each player.

The game started off quite well with some in character conversation about our level of grievance and what we could do about it. All the players skirted around the suggestion of blowing up parliament and it took some time before that was agreed upon as a solution (and in fact there were a couple of points where I thought that we might well do something completely different).

Having resolved that was what we were going to do we came up with a plan and then allocated some plausible roles to the plotters. As my character had been well educated and fought on the continent I was deputed to go to Flanders and attempt to buy gunpowder. This I duly did while others sorted out other aspects of the plot. Mostly what I did at this stage was join Jim in planting fireworks in the card model of the Houses of Parliament that he had been constructing while we were chatting earlier. We also did some testing of fuses and powder trails to make sure that it would be safe when we tried to set the whole thing off later. Obviously the people at DTI who regulate firework production have decided to stop people doing what we did as it was only with extreme difficulty that we managed to ignite the contents of a firework.

On returning to the other plotters I found that there was disappointing progress on the tunnel that we had been attempting but that a coal merchant who had a cellar under the Houses of Parliament had suddenly decided to shut up shop. We duly moved our wine importing business into the cellar and made a habit of

greeting the two guards that came round every night to check all was well with a tankard of wine. This was a blatant attempt to make them less worried about searching the cellar thoroughly and more interested in getting their free drinks.

As the time approached we moved the barrels of gunpowder into position over several days. At the last minute the date of the opening was changed. Guy Fawkes (played by Mukul) was a bit perturbed by this but I insisted that we should stay and carry on with business as usual until it was time to make things go bang. This might have been a mistake on my part. On the night of the 4th of November a whole group of guards came round to search the cellar, not including our usual two drinking chums. It was obvious as soon as they arrived that they weren't randomly searching and that giving them all some wine wouldn't prevent them from searching. Realising that there was no escape for me anyway I threw an oil lantern on the barrels of gunpowder and then drew my sword to buy enough time for the fire to catch properly. The outcome was a huge explosion.

As games went this one was pretty one sided and it might have been more fun if both protagonists had been player driven. However I did enjoy it a lot and felt that it was pretty good as an educational tool to explain the plot. I also felt a real moment of uncertainty when the state opening of parliament was postponed. We'd gone to some lengths to ensure that the plot remained secret, avoiding writing the letter that was written in history to warn the Catholic Lords not to attend.

As an excuse to build things and then blow them up it was second to none. We took Jim's lovingly constructed Houses of Parliament (complete with fireworks in the cellar) out to the end of my garden and got Guy Fawkes (Mukul) to light the blue touch paper before we all retired to a safe distance to watch the fireworks go off. There was about a minute of coloured lights and not much else until Mukul said, "It hasn't really gone off much". This was almost immediately followed by a very spectacular shower of explosions that made us all move further back...

### **Letter to the editor : Frequency of MilMud by James Kemp**

My firm belief is that there is a strong need for MilMud to be produced regularly for it to drive the club. It is one of the cogs in the machine alongside a strong programme, well advertised games (requiring that members write a piece in advance of their game to whet appetites for playing it) and a good turnout at meetings.

Adverts for games need not be in MilMud these days, they could equally well go on the web as links from the programme. However they do need to be produced by the game designers at least a few weeks in advance of meetings where the games are to be played or tested. I for one can't make all the meetings and knowing which ones to try for certainly helps. Although in saying that I've yet to be disappointed by a Chestnut Lodge Wargames Group meeting (and I hope never to be).

When I run games at meetings, I find the offside reports in MilMud very helpful in terms of getting the feedback that I need to improve the game design and to ensure that the next time out that game is better (or indeed just the next game). Also when you miss meetings reading the offside and onside reports of games gives you a good flavour of what happened and often strengthens the resolve to turn up the next time to get in some good playing and socialising.

I accept that asking for 12 issues of MilMud is probably unreasonable, but I don't think that 3-4 issues is nearly enough. Eight or nine is probably a more reasonable compromise. The material available should drive the timetable rather than just cutting down. For certain there needs to be a MilMud just before the conference and two more before Christmas to cover the wealth of material and enthusiasm that a good conference (like the one we've just had) generates. After that you probably need another MilMud to drum up things for the games weekend and a couple following it for the onside and offside reports. Another one during the summer months would also be helpful to avoid too long a gap. By my count that makes about 7 a year, with more should the material be there.